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WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

(MRS. ROSS CHURCH),

AUTHORESS OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "TOO GOOD FOR HIM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN

CHAPTER I.

AT GIBRALTAR.

My story is not a common story (or I trust so), and yet the scene with which it opens is a common scene enough. Fancy the garden of a villa, situated midway on the steep sides of Gibraltar Rock, with the rays of a Mediterranean sunset creeping over the sea, and lighting up each leaf and flower—each pane of glass and whitened wall, until both Nature and Art flushes red as a maiden's cheek beneath her lover's gaze; and last (though first), those component parts of the world's curse and blessing, love—a man and woman—and you have the place, time, and *dramatis*

personæ of the first picture I want you to draw for yourself.

The subject under discussion between them did not appear to have been of a pleasant nature, if one might judge by the expression of their faces, for they both looked troubled. He was leaning against a portion of trellis-work which surmounted part of the low wall, with his eyes fixed upon her changing features. She, sitting on the wall itself, hung over it almost too carelessly, as she looked across the quiet waters of the bay, and thought.

With a small, slight figure, and a dark skin, the girl (she was only a girl) was more piquante than pretty. Indeed, with the exception of a good complexion, through which upon occasions the damask blood showed clearly, and a pair of liquid hazel eyes, she had little pretensions to beauty of any decided order. But she possessed a higher gift than beauty: she was fascinating — dangerously so. There was more danger for men in the society of this little brown girl, with her ready blood, her killing glances, when she turned eyes upon

them that could flash like diamonds when she was angry, or grow misty with unshed tears when she was moved — her arch, unstudied manner, and her animated conversation—than in association with the biggest, fairest Juno in creation, who was incapable of feeling the same excitement, or saying the same things. As she sat now upon the low wall, her hazel eyes, black from their intensity of thought, gazing into space; her wavy rust-coloured hair (well calculated to provoke a Pre-Raphaelite's enthusiasm), appearing from its quantity almost too heavy for the small head it graced; and her bust, which was large for the slight waist beneath it, clearly defined against the evening sky—it would have been a critical eye indeed, and a cold heart, that could have found serious fault with the charms of Rachel Norreys.

She was not a Venus-Aphrodite in form, nor an angel in disposition, but she was better than either. She was a warm, impulsive, energetic woman, as quick to resent an injury to others as she was to confess a fault of her own; passionate in

temper, yet open as the day; passionate in feeling, but faithful unto death. She had not yet completed her one-and-twentieth year; and yet to look at her, one would have fancied she was older than the man who was leaning against the trellis-work, and staring at her on the present occasion. His thirty years had passed in such a prosperous, pleasant-indolence away, that they had left few traces, as they went, upon his handsome features; whilst the nervous creature before him had lived twenty-four months in every twelve ever since she had awakened to the meaning of that great word, Life. But in personal appearance her companion had decidedly the advantage over her. He was really very good-looking, quite an Apollo, so far as the inexorable exigencies of civilization and the irrefutable laws of his Bond Street tailor would permit one to judge; too much of an Apollo, indeed, to leave much room for anything but good-temper, and the strong sense of honour which, thank God, no true-bred English gentleman has ever yet been found too stupid to possess

beneath that low forehead, which was so very much on a line with the straight Grecian nose. Added to which, he had almond-shaped, sleepy blue eyes, and long fair moustaches and whiskers, and was, in fact, Captain Cecil Craven, of Her Majesty's 3rd Regiment of Royal Bays.

He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow—a fact which was, perhaps, in itself a sufficient excuse for many of the faults and follies of his useless life. For these widowed mothers with only sons have a vast deal to answer for in this world; and Cecil Craven's mother had proved no exception to the general rule. Left very rich by her late husband, her great desire had been that her son should not follow any profession, but live at home with her, looking after and enjoying what was his own and hers. And had it not been that beneath those handsome, effeminate features there lay hidden a tolerable amount of determination (generally shown by persistently going the wrong way), Cecil Craven had never entered the Bays—above all, followed the fortunes of his re-

giment upon foreign service. But his ideas of pleasure differed from those of his mother. Gibraltar suited his fancy, and therefore Gibraltar had had the honour of his presence for the last three years. He had been known for a longer time than that to the girl by his side, although she had not met him as a man until she also came to Gibraltar. But her father had been and was still an intimate friend of his mother's, and many of her school holidays had been spent at Craven Court, where she had always commanded a great amount of attention. At the time this story opens, the 3rd Royal Bays had already received orders to return to England, and was daily expecting the arrival of the transport containing the regiment destined to relieve it.

The girl was the first to break the silence, so suddenly and impetuously that she almost made her companion start.

"I *cannot* believe it, Captain Craven," were the passionate words; "I *will* not believe it; oh, say it is not true—that it cannot be true!"

"I wish I could, for your sake and my own," he rejoined, as her eyes went upward to meet his, almost imploringly; "but I am afraid it is only too true. I have been speaking on the subject again with him this morning, and his assertions are too strong for disbelief. But don't let it trouble you so, Rachel," he continued, with an attempt at consolation as he saw the light die out of the dark, humid eyes, and the heavy eyelashes droop again despondingly. The apparent supineness of his words kindled all the fire in her nature.

"Don't let it trouble me!" she exclaimed, loudly; "how can I help its troubling me? It has haunted me every moment since I heard it, it will haunt me (that bitter knowledge) till the last hour of my life. Oh! may God's curse!"—— and then she stopped short, blushing deeply, and lowered her tone: "I didn't mean that, Captain Craven; I forgot—please forgive me; but I am infinitely miserable!"

Cecil Craven's sleepy blue eyes had opened as wide as nature would permit them to do, as he heard her last exclama-

tion, and they had scarcely resumed their normal condition when he said, in answer,

"Do you know, I am almost afraid of you, Rachel!"

"Why?" she asked, quickly.

"Because you are so hasty; so—what d'ye call it—so deucedly hot; you'll be letting it all out some day before you know what you are about."

Her lip curled very visibly as she answered him, but he was not a man to detect sarcasm easily. "I swore, did I not?" she said; and to *him*, "why need you fear?"

"It's not for myself," he went on to say, without appearing to notice the interruption, "so much as for ——, there are others involved in it, and in a quarter —— it would hurt one very much, Rachel; I have never received anything but affection and consideration, yet, and——you don't suppose *I* don't feel it?"

His sentences were broken, as if he scarcely knew how to express himself, and a glow very much like shame had overspread his honest face the while.

"You need not be in the least afraid," the girl repeated, still looking away from him and over the sea; "a promise has always been a sacred thing with me. I cannot remember having broken one yet. This will be doubly so—for many reasons. Death shall not wrest the truth from me—whatever I suffer," she said in a lower tone, and then assuming a more cheerful one, added, "and now let us change the subject, Captain Craven. We can find a pleasanter one if we try."

But to turn a conversation quickly from an unpleasant to a pleasant subject is by no means an easy task, particularly if the former is one which materially affects your happiness, and has engrossed your mind for days past. Rachel Norreys and Cecil Craven felt it to be so, and for many minutes after her last words they preserved a total silence. The scene before them was a very lovely one. The garden in which they stood, and which lay at the back of the house, scarcely deserved the name, consisting of nothing more than a long belt of grass, with a few flowering shrubs to break its

monotony; but it overlooked the sea. Before them lay the deep-blue waters of the Mediterranean, like a broad sheet of glass, with vessels of all sizes, shapes, and characters riding snugly at anchor upon its bosom. On one side lay the convict-hulks, black and surly-looking, like evil consciences which refuse to smile when all the world is smiling—types of the guilt within them; whilst round and about their dark bodies the light skiffs and pleasure-boats, with their white sails and coloured awnings, went darting to and fro, under the influence of the breeze which had just commenced to ripple over the water: and still nearer inland might be seen the mail-packet from England, which had arrived that afternoon, and was employed in the unpleasant business of taking in coal, whilst her passengers were pleasure-seeking on shore. On the broad road which ran alongside of the water's edge, they might have been encountered in noisy, happy parties, harmlessly riotous in their excess of animal spirits, mixed up with groups of equestrians, and carriages full of residents turning out for

their evening's amusement. And looking beyond all this—beyond the carriages and horses, the pleasure-boats and convict-hulks —beyond the sea itself—the opposite shores of Africa were just visible in the clearness of the evening air—although the warmth was still the warmth of a summer's day.

This time Cecil Craven was the first to speak—

"You know the steamer has arrived?" he said, interrogatively.

All the colour faded out of her face—

"Not the transport!" she exclaimed.

"No, no. The mail. How I frightened you, Rachel! but you know we may expect the other at any moment."

"I am aware of it," she answered; "but I hope against Hope, and try to cheat myself into believing something may detain it."

"What if it should come? Do you think Dr. Browne is too ill to travel?"

"I am afraid so," she said, sadly. "He has certainly not gained strength during the last week. Sometimes I fancy he will never be strong again."

"Oh, nonsense! That is only your fancy," said her companion, though he knew the girl was right; "but even supposing that he could not sail with the headquarters ——"

Rachel interrupted him, "We should have to stay here," she said; and then added, hurriedly, "I can't bear the thoughts of it, Captain Craven! The transport is not likely to arrive so soon, is it? for I shall never see any of you again, if it does."

Her face was so distressed that he attempted to soothe her, against his conscience.

"No, no, far likelier to be delayed than not. Sometimes they keep a corps under orders for home for months. And what, if it does come? Dr. Browne would rejoin as soon as he was able. We should all be together again before long."

"But not me," said the girl, shaking her head, "not me. You forget, Captain Craven."

"Is that likely to come to pass so soon, then, Rachel."

"Papa," she began, and then hesitated, but went on directly afterwards with a slight stamp of her foot to emphasise the word. "Papa says so. He says it cannot be long now; he is always talking of it, he makes me wretched whenever he mentions the subject."

"It is the strangest thing I ever heard of," remarked Captain Craven, reflectively; "can't you remember him at all?"

"Remember him!" she repeated, impatiently, "of course I can. Cannot you remember things that took place when you were sixteen? I remember him only too well."

"What is he like?" he asked, nothing daunted by her manner.

"Why do you want to know?" she rejoined quickly, and then added, "when we were—when I knew him—he was tall—no, not very tall, about as tall as you are now, with dark eyes and hair; brown eyes, at least I think so, or grey—but I almost forget his face, it is so long ago. I know he was thin and tallish, and had no whiskers."

"You like men then with dark eyes and

hair, and without any whiskers," remarked Cecil Craven, with what was intended to be a careless air, as he fondly drew his own through and through his fingers.

She jerked her shoulders impatiently, and something of a frown came over her face.

"You know I do not," was all she said, in reply.

"Have you no picture of him?"

"No."

"Really?"

"Why really?" she said again, looking up.

"What! no picture to look at every spare moment, and talk to, and kiss, and put under your pillow every night. I thought that was what all ladies did when they were in love."

"I don't know anything about it," she answered, biting her lips.

"Are you not longing for the time to arrive when he shall come home? I suppose he will stay on shore for good now, won't he?"

He was torturing her, and he knew it, although for what reason God only could have witnessed, unless it were for that

unnecessary evidence of our fallen nature, which will permit the most generous of men at times to wound the women they love best, where one of their own sex is concerned, be there rivalry or not between them. Rachel Norreys, still sitting with her face turned from him, let the tears rise to her eyes in mute reply, and drop thence upon her lap without so much as noticing their fall.

"It will be all right then, Rachel," he continued, "will it not? You will forget all about the poor 3rd, and the days we have passed at old Gib together, eh?"

Then she could stand it no longer, and all her attempted show of pride and unconcern melted away beneath something rising in her heart.

"Oh, Captain Craven," she cried, "do you want to kill me? Don't torture me in this way. You know I shall be wretched and miserable: I feel as if I *couldn't* leave the 3rd, and Elise, and all of you. I know I shall never have a happy day afterwards. Oh! you are very cruel to me—you are *very*, *very* cruel!"

She was crying violently now. She sobbed and sobbed with her face in her hands till he was afraid that not only the inmates of the house, but the passers-by beneath the garden wall would hear her, and be alarmed. So he tried to pull her hands apart, and when he found he could not do so, he commenced to pour soothing words into her ear.

"Rachel, dear Rachel!" he said, "pray don't cry; I meant nothing. I was only in fun. I dare say none of these horrible things will come to pass. I bet we have months of happiness here together still. My dear girl, don't cry."

He had knelt on one knee beside her, trying to look into her face as he spoke; but she kept it persistently covered with her hands. The path on which they were (and which ran along the inside of the wall) was partially hidden from the house by a few clumps of shrubs, and as he was attempting to console her, and she remained with her face still buried, a step came across the grass, and round the shrubs, before they were cognisant of any one's approach. It

was only a servant with a note—the wife of one of the soldiers of the regiment who had been promoted to the place of maid to Dr. Browne's daughter some little time before. She was a tall, angular woman, with sharp, black eyes, and hair growing low on her forehead, in what is termed a "widow's peak." A woman with a vindictive temper and a quiet respectful voice,—a woman whom her mistress hated, had hated from the first, and, trusting to the instinct of her nature, should never have taken into her service. As she appeared now, noiselessly creeping under the sheltering shrubs, Captain Craven sprang to his feet at once, and Rachel, uncovering her wet face, without time to conceal her emotion, asked her what she wanted.

"Only a note for Mrs. Norreys from Mrs. Arundel," said the woman, with a sufficiently perceptible emphasis on the first title to have made a stranger turn at once to look for the wedding-ring upon Rachel's left hand. Yes, it was there, although almost hidden by three or four ordinary rings which surmounted it. As Mrs. Norreys

took the note and looked the woman in the face, the return glance that met hers had something in it that roused her quick temper.

"Why cannot you walk like other people, Caroline?" she demanded, angrily, "instead of sneaking down the garden as if you wanted to listen to what was being said."

"Sneaking!" echoed the woman, with eyes full of a respectfully reproachful surprise; "I walked as I always do walk, Mrs. Norreys, and I didn't suppose I was likely to hear anything that I should not——"

"Go away," said Mrs. Norreys, shortly; and as the servant disappeared, she exclaimed with warmth, "I hate that woman, Captain Craven, she is always listening at keyholes and opening drawers; I know she is, and yet if I ever catch her at it she has always a ready excuse. She's a horridly sly creature!"

"Rather dangerous, though, isn't it," remarked Captain Craven, who had not liked the expression in the servant's face, "to make an enemy of a woman like that? They are very revengeful sometimes."

"Revengeful," said Rachel, opening her note and her eyes at the same moment. "Why, what harm could she do me? I'll give her warning if I hear any more of it." And then she skimmed her note, with looks still sparkling and cheeks flushed from her late excitement, whilst Cecil Craven switched off the leaves of the wall-creepers, and wished that the servant had not caught them just at that identical moment.

"Elise wants me to go over there this evening after papa is asleep," said Rachel, presently, in reference to her note; "that will not be till nine o'clock. Are you going, Captain Craven?"

"Yes; Mrs. Arundel asked me this morning, when we were riding together, if I would look in after mess. We seem always to be meeting there now, don't we? This will make the third time this week."

"If you would rather I did not go——" said Rachel, demurely.

"Rather you did not go!—yes, you know I would rather you did not go, don't you?" he answered, laughing. "Why, Rachel I feel, I have felt, ever since—you know

what—that we cannot be too near or dear to one another. You will give me that consolation, will you not? You will let me feel that to all the pain of such a discovery there is at least some counterbalancing happiness? You will let me have a little of the affection which I have almost a right, or I feel so, to claim from you?"

She had blushed visibly as he bantered her, but with his last words her looks grew earnest, and as he concluded, her hand stole into his. He accepted the action as answer, and raised it to his lips. Then he said, "How very intimate you seem with Mrs. Arundel: why, you are always there!"

"Pretty nearly always," she replied, gaily; for the little divertissement which her indignation against the servant had occasioned had had the effect of making her lose sight for the time of her previous cause of trouble, and apparently restored her spirits. "I am there every day regularly; I have so few friends, you see, and Elise is the dearest creature possible; she is just like a sister to me; we are inseparable."

"Bosom friends, eh?" said Captain

Craven. "I suppose that means that you tell her everything, doesn't it?"

"Not quite everything," answered Rachel, blushing again; "but very nearly: so does she me; she tells me all about her husband, and her private affairs; and I tell her——"

"All about yours," surmised Captain Craven. A dark cloud came over her face, and she was silent. "Well, all about *who* then," he continued; "not all about *me*, I hope, Rachel?"

"I have nothing to tell about you," she answered, though she felt she was not saying the exact truth, and then added, "but why should I not?"

He pulled his moustaches for some time, in hope of pulling out an answer, but it was long coming, she gazing inquiringly into his face the while.

"Well, I don't know," he at last ejaculated; "but still what passes between friends, I think, best kept to themselves."

"But I thought you were great friends with Elise, or you used to be," said Rachel.

It was an innocent remark on her part, but the random shaft hit hard, for, as it

happened, Cecil Craven *had* been "very good friends" with Mrs. Arundel, so good, indeed, that to that fact alone might be attributed the reason that he did not now particularly care that she should know he was "very good friends" with anybody else. But however this may have been, he kept it to himself.

"Not such friends as I am with you, Rachel—as I should wish to be with you. Mrs. Arundel may be a very good creature, but——"

"Now, I'll have no 'buts' about dear Elise," interposed Rachel; "she is the best friend I have, Captain Craven, and you shall not abuse her before me."

Captain Craven was just about to indignantly refute the accusation of having had the slightest intention of abusing any friend of Mrs. Norreys, when their conversation was interrupted for the second time that evening.

CHAPTER II.

DR. BROWNE AND MRS. NORREYS.

A SUCCESSION of forced coughs drew off their attention from themselves, and caused their eyes to be simultaneously turned in the direction of the house. Then they perceived the same servant who had brought the note to Rachel again approaching them with downcast eyes and measured steps, coughing at intervals on her road. Rachel blazed up again immediately.

"What does she mean by coughing?" she said, appealing to Cecil Craven; "does she intend to be insolent?"

Captain Craven thought it looked very much like it, but he only answered for the sake of peace, "Oh, dear no; the evening air ——"

"If you please, Mrs. Norreys," said the

woman as she came up to them, "the doctor has been inquiring for you several times, and he wishes you to go in to him now. It was the doctor sent me to call you."

"Oh, dear papa is awake! I must go then, Captain Craven; I shall see you again this evening."

This much, as long as the servant was within hearing; but when she had disappeared into the house, Rachel exclaimed in quite a different tone of voice,—

"Now, what does that creature mean by calling me 'Mrs. Norreys' in that pointed manner? She has never been used to say anything more than 'ma'am;' and papa so often calls me 'Miss Rachel' still, that the servants mostly call me so also. What does she mean, Captain Craven?"

She half suspected what she meant by the heightened colour in her face and the agitation in her voice; but she wanted him to refute her suspicion for her, which he felt unable to do, for he was too angry himself at what had passed.

"I cannot venture to say," was his guarded reply; "I think I should dismiss

her if I were you. There are better women in the regiment. What made you take her ?"

"Her husband, Wilson, is one of papa's pets, and so I suppose he thought that Mrs. Wilson must be a pet as well. However, she is none of mine. But I must not stay a moment longer. I never keep my father——"

Here she fancied that the young man's eyes, which were simply turned in the direction of her face, meant more than he ever intended that they should, and stopped short.

"Well," said Captain Craven, in anticipation of the conclusion of her sentence which never came, for tears had rushed at the call of memory into the honest hazel eyes, and the voice had thickened under the influence of the emotion.

"Don't think me foolish," she commenced, presently, in a broken tone; "but it seems the worst part of the business to me that I have no longer any right——. I love him so, Captain Craven."

"I love you for it," was all his reply;

and then the light figure flitted away from him, with no other farewell than a look of gratitude, until it was lost in the shade of the broad creeper-covered verandah which surrounded the villa, and he was left alone by the garden wall, gazing after her with a feeling of wonder rising in his heart that he never should have discovered how much character Rachel Norreys possessed until the last few days; and a word nearly akin to an oath upon his lips, as he thought upon the circumstances that had drawn the depths of that character out.

As for her, another minute found her by her father's side. Not by his bedside, but by his sofa, where he lay all the day, although he was scarcely strong enough even to bear the slight fatigue of the constant removals. Dr. Browne had been a fine handsome man before the wasting fever came upon him, which had sapped his strength, whitened his hair, drawn his features, and was daily bringing him lower. A man of not more than fifty years, handsomer far than Rachel would ever be as a woman, but with only half her cleverness,

though twice her common sense—common sense which he had exercised in everything, except the bringing up of this motherless girl, whom he had most untiringly and indefatigably spoilt from the first day that she had been committed to his charge.

As Rachel came lightly up to his side on the present occasion, and clasped her arms about his neck, Dr. Browne's face gleamed as if the sunshine had looked into the window, and passed over it.

"Well, dear old father," she said, "have you been awake long?"

"No, my dear, only a few minutes; but the orderly has brought round some English letters. Caroline tells me they came at noon."

"So they did, darling; but you were just getting drowsy, and so I told her to put them on one side."

"There is one for you, Rachel, or I should not have disturbed you, my dear. Who has been in the garden with you this afternoon?"

"Only Captain Craven," she answered,

but she coloured slightly as she did so, and a faint sigh escaped her unawares.

Dr. Browne's ear caught the sound and echoed it; then, as if to divert the girl's thoughts or his own, he said, quickly: "There is news for you, Rachel—good news from Raymond. I have also heard from him. The 'Agincourt' has left the Cape."

"What?" exclaimed his listener, every particle of colour deserting her face, and leaving her eyes suddenly dulled and blank. "What?"

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear," said the doctor, observing her emotion, "perhaps I should not have mentioned it without a little preparation; but I have told you for months that it was likely to happen. The 'Agincourt' was under sailing orders when your husband wrote, and by this time he must be in England. Raymond fancied we should be at home ourselves when his letters reached, and addressed them to the care of his mother, who forwarded them, with a line from herself, to say that she expects her son

very shortly. I am afraid he will be disappointed, poor lad, to find we have not left Gibraltar, but we shall not be long after him. Read your own letter, Rachel, it will tell you more than I can."

But Rachel did not make an attempt to read it. She remained as she had become on receiving it,—immoveable, silent.

Dr. Browne looked at her for some minutes without speaking, and then he said, "Rachel!"

She started almost as if he had fired a pistol in her ear, and the recollection of where she was, and what she was doing, returning to her mind, brought the colour back in redoubled measure to her cheeks, and the brilliance to her eyes.

"Oh, papa, darling!" she exclaimed, suddenly; and seizing upon a jug which stood amongst a group of heterogeneous articles on a table by his side, "you have not any lemonade left. What is that woman about? Let me fetch it for you," and she prepared to leave him as she spoke.

"Rachel, my dear!" he called after her,

in his enfeebled voice, "I do not wish for any. Caroline is gone to make me some coffee, Rachel, my child."

But Rachel was deaf, or rather Rachel chose to be deaf, and was already gone. She did not run away to think, or to cry, or to read her letter in private; she escaped for one minute's respite—one minute only to remind herself that she had borne a greater trouble, heard worse news than this, and without flinching, for his sake; to tell herself that it was inevitable and of her own seeking, that he must not, should not, see the pain it cost her; to remember, with a frightened feeling at her heart that it might not be for long, that it could not be for ever, that she should have the option even of dissembling before him, and then the respite was over, and the brave heart (ready to bleed if need be, so long as what it loved was unconscious of its suffering) went back to stand the ordeal of a calm, searching gaze from fatherly eyes. Only a minute—she was not absent longer—an order for more lemonade given, and Rachel was back again, the same girl

who rushed in all anxiety for her father's comfort from her broken interview at the garden wall. Back again, to throw herself upon the ground by the sick man's couch, and lean her wearied young head against the side of it.

"You take too much trouble for me, dear Rachel," said Dr. Browne, as he lovingly stroked the ruddy chestnut hair, which lay against his knees.

"I couldn't," she answered, earnestly; "you're better to-day, father, are you not?"

Dr. Browne shook his head.

"Not much stronger, I am afraid, my little girl. Harris doesn't agree with me; but I fancy I know better than he does. If the 'Agincourt' left the Cape on the 1st of April, she ought to be in the Downs by the beginning of June, and this is the 10th. Depend upon it, she is already there. Why don't you read your letter, Rachel?"

"Oh, it will keep," she said, "until you are asleep, darling, or I want something to do."

"I hoped you would have been more in-

terested in your husband's return than that, my dear," answered the doctor, gravely. "I'd lay anything poor Raymond doesn't keep your letters long unopened. The one he has written to me is full of joyous anticipation. The boy loves you, Rachel, and dearly, if I mistake not."

She made no reply to this; she only gave the same impatient jerk to her shoulders that we have seen her do before, backed up with a heavy sigh. Dr. Browne heard it, although she had not intended him to do so, and it entered into his soul. The act for which he had blamed himself for so many years!—was the punishment to come upon him only now—now, when he felt life to be slipping away from beneath him? He had loved the girl before him very dearly—loved her from a little infant, for herself alone, with all a parent's doting, blind affection—loved her doubly for the sake of her who had borne her, the mother of this wayward and impulsive Rachel, who, almost as wayward, certainly as impulsive, had yet been the idol of the fresh, warm youth of the man who now lay dying,

and reproaching himself, lest the shadow of his early fancy should interpose between him and death, and haunt him out of this world with its reproachful eyes, for the trouble in which he left the daughter she had left him. He had indulged Rachel as he had never had the power nor opportunity to indulge her mother. He had denied her nothing within his reach; he had allowed her fertile mind to run wild, until the weeds had gained such pre-eminence that they threatened to choke all that was so naturally sweet and fruitful there; indulged her until the foolish, imprudent act had taken place which made her "Mrs. Norreys," but which had, at the same time, made her, as he hoped, the wife of a man who, though too young for such a responsibility, loved her, and was loved honourably in return. Of late he had commenced to doubt the latter clause—to-day, her strange manner had almost made him disbelieve it. But he felt that he must know the truth now—now, before he died, and the silence of the grave rendered all his desires useless; for, if his conjectures were right,

something—anything—must be done, rather than his Rachel — his long-loved and cherished child—should be left in the world without him, and unhappy.

"Rachel," he said, very gravely, and the girl could hear his voice tremble as he spoke, "how long is it since you have ceased to care about Raymond's letters and Raymond's return? At one time your head was full of nothing else; now you appear to me always to avoid the subject. It is not possible that you have left off caring for your husband, is it?" and then the sick man added, with increased agitation, "tell me it is not possible, my dear child—tell me it is not true. It was a source of great trouble to me at the time; but I have gradually come to look upon it in a happier light, and latterly have almost rejoiced that it was so, and that I should not leave my girl (for I shall leave you soon, darling) unprotected in a cruel world. Oh, Rachel! you, above all other women, have need of a husband's protection, and you know it. You will not take away my last and best hope from me! You will tell

me that, with myself, you are anticipating with pleasure the return of Raymond Norreys?"

Rachel awoke. She had been mentally walking in her sleep for the last few days, her mind almost torpid under the influence of a great shock from which it had not yet recovered; but she had run her head against a brick wall in her dreamy wanderings, and the concussion roused her. Here was her father, in whose weak state any agitation must prove hurtful, alarmed and anxious for her sake; her secret, which she had held within her own breast for years, permitting it to corrode her heart, and turn all the brightest colours of her life to ashen gray, rather than it should trouble him (to save whose feelings she would have sacrificed herself, far more her own), nearly divulged at such a moment; and all for her own want of tact, her own selfish forgetfulness of everything but her trouble. The shock alarmed her, too; for the moment she started, reddened at the direct charge, and then paled as she prepared to answer it; but that over, all was over. From that moment she

armed herself to meet the difficulty, and was never, whilst the necessity for concealment lasted, found sleeping on her post again.

"Dearest father," she exclaimed, "what are you thinking of? I will read Raymond's letter at once if that will set your mind at rest about me. I dare say I do not talk so much about him as I used to do; but think what a long time it is since I have seen him—five years, darling; why, it's an eternity at my age! I dare say I shan't know him again when we meet, but it won't take long to do that, will it? Only, father, you must get well again, like a dear old boy. I cannot enjoy anything when you are ill; you forget that it throws a gloom over the pleasantest prospect for me. You *will* get well, papa, won't you? and then we will all go to England together and be jolly." And she raised herself as she spoke, until she could throw her arms again about her father's neck, and lay her head down on his bosom. If a lie is ever righteous, it must be when we tell it to save the beloved and dying pain. And yet this girl's heart sickened, as she lay in her father's embrace,

to think of the one she had just uttered, and her mental ejaculation was, "God forgive me!"

Dr. Browne held her there, and was very silent. He could not deceive her as she had deceived him, and buoy her up with false hopes of his recovery; he believed himself too near eternity to do it. But he caressed her head with his hand, and moved his lips across her forehead, and sent up many an unspoken prayer for his child's happiness wherever he might be.

"Papa, dear," next said Rachel from his breast, "I want to dismiss Caroline Wilson."

"Dismiss Caroline, my darling — for what?" demanded Dr. Browne, with surprise.

Rachel hesitated a moment before she could say for what; then she answered, "I don't like the woman, papa; I never did; I think she is very sly."

"Have you any particular complaint to lodge against her, Rachel?"

"No, nothing particular; but I am sure she is deceitful; she is always listening at

the doors, and trying to pry into everything. It is odious in a person whom you are obliged to have so much about you."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Dr. Browne, "and I am sure Wilson would be sorry to hear it also. I thought she was such a quiet, respectable sort of woman."

"Too quiet for me," remarked Rachel.

"Well, my dear," said the doctor, "you shall do as you like about it, only I should think it a pity to give her warning just yet. The relief-transport may arrive at any moment, and it would be very awkward for you to go on board ship without an attendant; besides, she is very useful to me, Rachel; she understands all my little ways now, and I think I should feel her going whilst I am so ill."

"That's quite enough, father," exclaimed Rachel, "if she is any comfort to you, I would keep her if she had horns and a tail, which I believe she has, if any one would take the trouble to look for them."

Dr. Browne took all her jests in earnest.

"I don't think poor Caroline can be

quite so bad as that, dear child," he said, quietly; "but if she is not a favourite of yours, you will have a good excuse for dismissing her when you get back to England."

England and Raymond! How the prospect sent the blood back from the woman's heart—a girl in ordinary things, a woman when she thought of this!

"Here is Caroline with your coffee, papa!" was her next exclamation, quickly given, lest any further remarks should be made upon the subject, and overheard. "Let me raise you, darling, whilst she pours it out;" and, suiting the action to the word, she passed her young arms, slight and tender though they were, under the wasted frame of the sick man, and pulled him gently into a sitting posture.

"Are you going out this evening, Rachel?" he asked, as he received the cup of coffee from the hands of Caroline, and she stood by him, ready to take it back again when he should have finished.

"Yes, papa—after you are asleep—not before; and only then if you are sure not

to want me. Elise asked me to run over for an hour's chat."

"Who is to be there, my dear?" asked her father.

"I don't know," replied Rachel, at first carelessly; but, raising her eyes, and encountering those of Mrs. Wilson fixed upon her, she corrected herself with an air of defiance which the occasion seemed scarcely to merit, "excepting Captain Craven, who was asked to go in the afternoon; but that is the extent of my knowledge. I do not suppose there will be any one else, except poor old Jack."

Poor old Jack being the legitimate appendage from whom Mrs. Arundel derived her name, may show, in some measure, the degree of intimacy to which Mrs. Norreys had advanced with that lady and her husband.

"Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself, my dear; and you had better tell Barnes to call for you and see you home."

Barnes being the doctor's regimental servant and general factotum. But Rachel had no need of Barnes; it was no distance; she

could come alone; or "old Jack" would escort her. She would rather Barnes were not troubled in the matter.

"It would be no trouble for Barnes, sir," said Mrs. Wilson, appealing to Dr. Browne; "he is always up till eleven, or so; and Miss Rachel, of course, wouldn't be home late."

"Miss Rachel" turned a look upon the speaker that ought to have withered her; but it did not seem to have any effect, for the servant's eyes were still fixed in the direction of Dr. Browne's, as if awaiting his decision.

"You had better have Barnes, my dear," he said to his daughter.

"No! I will *not* have Barnes," she answered, angrily. "I can see myself home. I have said before that I do not wish for him."

"I think you had better, ma'am," commenced Caroline.

"Mind your own business!" was her mistress's decisive reply, "and take those coffee-cups away."

One look from her vindictive eyes, and

the woman, muttering under her breath, did as she was desired, and left the room.

"Are you not rather hard upon Caroline, my love?" said Dr. Browne, afterwards, as the bonnie head he loved so well nestled up closely to him again; "you speak so harshly to her."

"I *hate* her," rejoined Rachel: "however, do not let us talk of it, papa darling. I'll make her over to you *in toto*; and the more she keeps out of my way the better I shall be pleased. Let me read to you, father, or sing to you; or what shall it be?"

"Sing, dear Rachel; get your guitar, and sing to me." And for some time afterwards nothing was heard in the quiet sitting-room but the clear, sweet notes of her girlish voice as they sounded through the stillness of approaching night.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. NORREYS' BOSOM FRIEND.

Mrs. Arundel—Eliza Arundel, as was her real name—Elise, as she would be called—the wife of "poor old Jack," and the bosom friend of Mrs. Norreys, was rather an ample friend to take to any one's bosom. Metaphorically speaking, however, she was "all that" to my unwary heroine; *c'est-à-dire* she was the recipient of all her news, personal and otherwise, the correspondent of her confidential letter-writing (ah! what worse than folly lies in that confidential letter-writing!), and the adviser in all her little purchases, as well as all her little scrapes. Mrs. Arundel was a very fine-looking woman of, at this time,

perhaps eight-and-twenty or thirty years of age. She was tall and fair, and well-covered, with a plump white neck and bust, of which she always showed as much as civilized society permits a lady to do (and civilized society permits a good deal in these days). She had full light-blue eyes, and rather heavily-cut features, particularly about the lower part of her face, where the jaw was large and square, and the chin massive. But she was *fine*, decidedly; some people might think too fine; but every one has their enemies. She was a great contrast to "poor old Jack," who was anything but fine, having a stumpy, not to say podgy, figure, and a bullet head, but who was one of the mildest, most inoffensive men withal, and had laid himself down through life with the greatest good-will to be trampled on, and ignored, and insulted, by his huge, white Juggernaut of an Eliza, appearing, moreover, blissfully unconscious all the while that her heavy yoke was on him, or that it was anything out of the common way, if it was. There were some children of this ill-fated

Jack, who were treated much in the same manner as himself—at least they were kept in the nursery all day long, whilst he was kept in the background; and perhaps of the two, the children felt it the least. But whether he felt it or not, God only knows, for Jack Arundel lived and died, and made no sign. He had been married for ten years to Juggernaut, and during that time she had always followed in the track of the Royal Bays, and was as well known in it as the Colonel himself, to whom, indeed, Major Arundel was only second in command. Juggernaut had seen many a youngster enter the corps, who had sprouted his whiskers, gone into debt, sold his commission—married, perhaps, or died; and yet she still remained stationary to shake hands with his successor. Many she had known intimately, for she was a woman fond of men's society, and to not a few had her white neck and arms, her languishing eyes, and reputation not entirely free from the onus of an undue love for flirtation, proved the means of inoculation with that fever which all must take, sooner

or later, and which proves fatal to so small a number. Cecil Craven had been one of these victims: indeed, some five years before, when Elise Arundel had not been quite so developed, and Captain Craven had had nothing better to do, a little scandal (which amounted to rather more than rumour) had sprung up in the 3rd relative to her intimacy with that gentleman. Whether there was really any truth in the statement never came to light. The report arose, was talked of privately, and commented upon until it reached the ears of its subject, when a good deal was dropped on her part that had been carried on before—at least outwardly. Then the scandal died a natural death; people got tired of discussing it when no fresh food was given them to discuss upon; somebody else did something else naughty, and they had no more time to devote to the flirtation of Mrs. Arundel with Captain Craven. Whether Eliza Arundel had forgotten it in company with her kind friends, as this story develops you will discover for yourselves; one thing is certain, that Cecil Craven had

not, for the remembrance of it came rather unpleasantly before him sometimes when he was talking with Rachel Norreys; and he had wished to himself, more than once, that the two ladies were not quite so intimate with one another.

If, however, Mrs. Arundel shared the remembrance with him, she took good care not to let him see that she did so; and as for Rachel, she had no idea that he had ever professed to be more than a friend to her friend. She had often remarked to him, as a trait of goodness in her dear Elise, how perfectly free she seemed from jealousy at their predilection for one another's company, even appearing to further their intimacy as much as she could by contriving meetings for them, and bringing them together as often as it was in her power. And Cecil Craven, though he was not a clever man, had shown his sense upon such occasions by holding his tongue and keeping his opinions to himself. On the evening in question, he happened to be the first to present himself in Mrs. Arundel's drawing-room.

"Ah! signor," she exclaimed, as she came forward to meet him, in all the glories of a blue silk dress, out of which appeared almost as much of her body as there was in, "something told me *you* would not be behindhand this evening. Now it is no good looking round the room, because I haven't hidden her anywhere. She has not come yet: *patience, mon ami, patience.*"

Mrs. Arundel had an odious habit of continually interspersing her conversation with French and Italian words, which she considered very refined and elegant, and a proof of the society she had mixed in. In reality, however, she knew little or nothing of either language, and the few hack phrases which she compelled to do duty upon all occasions were the extent of her knowledge. Cecil Craven knew them so well, that he could almost have told beforehand which of her stock-in-trade she was about to use. He was accustomed to her remarks, and was always annoyed at them; but on the present occasion he bit his lips, and appeared doubly so.

"Thank you for your advice, my dear

Mrs. Arundel," he said, in answer, and rather coolly; "but you had better have kept it for some one who needs it more. Having succeeded in reaching *your* presence, my impatience is at an end. What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon?"

"Ah! you may well ask. What have *you* been doing, that you forgot your promise this morning to bring me those back numbers of the 'Cornhill Magazine' from the mess? I expected you every hour."

Cecil Craven started. He had really forgotten all about it. He was not quick enough to frame an excuse for himself, and so he only looked guiltily conscious. He attempted at last to stammer out a reply; but the lady interrupted him, by laying her full white hand upon his mouth.

"Now, Craven, don't commit yourself. I have no doubt you were better employed. The days are past for that sort of thing. There *was* a time——"

She looked at him with a most languishing glance as she uttered the words; but his eyes were cast down, and did not meet hers. Then he said, shortly,—

"I say, where's Arundel?"

Her face changed immediately, and she attempted to cover her annoyance by an affectation of great gaiety.

"Jack?—why, the dear old boy's smoking a pipe, of course, after his dinner. You will find him in the dining-room, if you want him, Captain Craven."

"I do wish to say a word to him, Mrs. Arundel, if you'll excuse me for leaving you. I'll be back directly."

"Pray don't hurry yourself," she replied, sarcastically.

But the tone was lost upon him; for he availed himself of her permission without so much as turning his eyes again in the direction of her figure; and when he had left the room, the look she sent after him was almost one of hate. People do not talk to themselves aloud in real life, or very seldom so; they do not stand in the centre of a room and soliloquize, in order generously to let the public know what they are thinking about, and to throw a light upon their subsequent actions; but they do hold communion with their own hearts, and the con-

versation is audible enough to themselves, and as impressive as if it had been uttered. In Eliza Arundel's heart were running at that moment sentences very akin in meaning to the following, although not a word passed her angry, trembling lips :—

"You have not forgotten what has passed between us, Cecil Craven, although you try to make me believe that you have done so, because you have taken a fancy in another direction, and are tired of our intimacy. You delight in making me jealous; but you shall never have the pleasure of seeing that I am so again. It is useless trying to win you back at present—I only injure my own cause by the attempt; but wait until I have you in my power, and then see if it was worth your while to throw my regard on one side directly it suited your convenience to do so."

There is no doubt her thoughts ran somewhat in this strain, though it would be rash roundly to assert that she would have used these identical words, as there is no doubt that she hated to watch the intimacy between Cecil Craven and her particular

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friend, and yet apparently did all she could to further it.

"Amica mia!" she enthusiastically exclaimed, half an hour later, as Rachel, all white muslin and green ribbons, with her guitar in one hand and her hat in the other, ran into the room, and was folded in her arms, "I have been dying for you to come; for, of course, a *certain* gentleman found Jack and smoking more conducive to his enjoyment than the drawing-room, since *somebody* had not arrived. However, we shall see him in again before long now, or I am very much mistaken. How is the dear pater to-night, carissima mia?"

"No better, I am afraid, Elise. He seemed as weak as a child when we put him to bed. The weather is so hot and so trying."

"And yourself, petite, how wags the world with you? I have not seen you all to-day. I thought you were lost, or had eloped with a party who shall be nameless."

"Oh, Elise, *don't!*" implored Rachel, whilst a vivid blush mounted up to her

forehead, and spread itself over all her features.

"Pardon, chérie, j'ai tort. I forgot that such things were only done, not spoken of. Have you any news?"

"Yes, indeed," sighed Rachel, "bad news for me. What do you think, dear Elise—the 'Agincourt' was expected at home the beginning of this month?"

"Ciel!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, in a tone of horror, "ma pauvre petite. But you are joking, Rachel, surely!"

"No, indeed, I am not," replied poor Rachel, who scorned to desert her native language in ordinary converse, "it is too true: we received the letters by this afternoon's mail. Oh, Elise! what shall I do? What a miserable, wretched girl I am! I feel as if I should like to drown myself."

She threw her arms around her friend's neck as she spoke, and cried,

"Oh, my dear Rachel!" said Mrs. Arundel, forgetting her French in her desire to stop the girl's tears, "I dare say Mr. Norreys will turn out a very charming fellow, and you will get on very nicely together. Dear

me! a handsome young husband coming home is nothing to cry about. I wish I was half so lucky myself."

"Oh! how can you talk in that way, Elise, when you know all? I feel as if I could not live until the ship comes home,—as if there was nothing to live for."

"Tais-toi, chérie, tais-toi," said her friend as she tapped the girl's back with her fan; "you must learn not to talk of such things, whatever you may think. You are a silly child—you must let all that little business rest between you and me," (Rachel raised her eyes inquiringly at this juncture, but Mrs. Arundel went on speaking, and gave her no time to put in a word)—"come, dry your eyes—I hear the gentlemen coming—corragio, amica mia."

She did not tell the girl to be brave, and look forward to the expected advent of her husband as a future of love and happiness for herself. She did not tell her that, whatever that future might prove, her duty in it could not be otherwise than plain. She did not caution her (where it was evident she considered caution necessary) against

cherishing an unlawful affection, and laying up a remorse for herself which might never die. If she had, what might she not have saved her from—what trouble, already advancing in the unknown hereafter towards the heart of Rachel Norreys might not, at such friendly warning, have turned its steps another way, and never borne a closer inspection! But Eliza Arundel did none of this. On the contrary, her first appeal, on the entrance of her husband and Captain Craven, was to the latter gentleman to come to her aid, and attempt the consolation of "cette pauvre pétite."

"Really, Captain Craven, you must come and help me to scold this naughty little thing, who is crying her eyes out about nothing at all, at least that *I* can see; but you are a privileged person, I know, and perhaps she may tell you more than she has me. Come, go along both of you, and have a good talk in the verandah. I know you don't want me, and, what's more, I don't want you; for I am going to have my old Jack all alone this evening, and give him a good scolding for something he has done

naughty. Now, Major Arundel, what have you to say for yourself?"

It was Mrs. Arundel's way sometimes, when she wished to be facetious, to affect the playful tyrant over poor old Jack, but as that gentleman enjoyed an unvarying supply of the real article in private, he never seemed to care much about the imitation. And on the present occasion his feebly-expressed desire to know the reason why he should be dragged away from the presence of his guests against his will, was so vehemently backed by both Rachel and Captain Craven that unitedly they gained the day.

Rachel had lifted her glowing face, upon which the tears had quickly dried with shame at their discovery, from the shoulder of her friend as soon as ever she heard the first appeal to Captain Craven on her behalf. The girl was annoyed that it should be so; she might tell him as much as she chose herself, but she could not understand why Elise should wish to draw general attention to the fact of her distress and its cause. She thought that women were in-

tended to hide such things for one another. During Mrs. Arundel's next words she stood apart, a little proudly, and disclaimed eagerly all wish or need of consolation from any one; and when her friend attempted to force her to a private interview with Cecil Craven as if he possessed the right as well as the means of comforting her, the protest she put in against any such arrangement had sufficient vehemence in it, to be almost indignant.

"Just as you like, my dears," said Mrs. Arundel, when Cecil Craven's entreaty that the party should not be separated was added to that of the others; "just as you like; please yourselves and you please me. I only proposed what I thought most agreeable for us all;" but there was a touch of offence, of what is commonly termed "huffiness," in her manner as she said the words, which showed that her temper was one easily upset, and that her affirmation of the pleasure of her friends making her own was not entirely true.

It will be as well at this juncture to pause and answer the question which will

naturally have risen in the minds of most readers of this story, "How was it that an open, honourable, disposition like that of Rachel Norreys' could ever have found sufficient sympathy in that of Eliza Arundel to draw the two women so closely together in the bonds of friendship?" To those who have been thrown in military exile upon the companionship of a very few, the question scarcely needs a solution, and even to individuals who know nothing of such a life it is soon explainable. There are various forms of affection in this world, and one of the most common, and easiest mistaken for love, is that of attachment—such an attachment as subsisted, on one side at least, of this miscalled friendship. In a station like Gibraltar, for instance, where there are very few ladies, and very little in-door amusement, time passes heavily unless there are one or two houses, at which one is sufficiently intimate to run in and spend a few hours whenever one likes. And in the case of a girl like Rachel Norreys, without children or husband to occupy her time, and her father employed on his own duty

most of the day, such a resource was almost essential. Circumstances had thus thrown her upon the society of Mrs. Arundel for the last three years, and the constant association and close intimacy which resulted from it had led her to believe that she loved the woman, and that the woman loved her. Added to which, Eliza Arundel had the subtilty of the serpent, to enable her to maintain the credit of being harmless as the dove; and although Rachel was no simpleton to be easily hookwinked, like all trusty people, she was slow to believe others untrustworthy. And the friend she had faith in, was woman enough to know how far to raise her suspicions, and what salve to apply to the wound such raising might occasion. Amidst a large choice of acquaintance, Rachel's fancy would probably never have alighted upon Mrs. Arundel; but fate, solitude, and a heart ill at ease combined, had served to spread a net beneath her feet, which she, like many another of her sex before her, found it eventually impossible to disentangle herself from, without rending it, and much of

her life's happiness at the same time, to pieces.

But to return to the evening in question, an awkward silence followed for a time Mrs. Arundel's last words and look of offence; such a silence as must occasionally fall upon a small circle when private affairs are touched upon, and do not insure a general sympathy. Captain Craven tried to dispel the present feeling by taking up Rachel's guitar.

"Sing us something, Mrs. Norreys," he said, "if it will not be too much for you."

Rachel's manner refuted the idea of anything being too much for her. She wished to make every one present forget that she had ever shed a tear; particularly she wished to forget herself the means by which Mrs. Arundel had endeavoured to dry them. She took up her guitar, with an air of apparent pleasure in the anticipation of amusing them, and said she had no new songs, but Captain Craven was welcome to any of the old ones that he chose to name. He, of course, chose "any one Mrs. Norreys pleased," which was as good as

saying, "none at all;" and then Mrs. Arundel put in her veto for "La Desolazione," a little melancholy thing by Giuseppe Lillo. It seemed hardly a friendly act to call for it, for there was a wild despairing tone breathed through the melody which, joined to the sad words, was not calculated to raise spirits already drooping. Rachel could not help thinking, as she heard the request, that Elise must remember that the very last time she had sung that song before her, she had been melted to tears at the sound of her own voice, and the thoughts which the melancholy words it uttered engendered. She gave one upward glance at the face of her friend, as much as to say, "Is this forgetfulness or malice?" and then blaming herself for the unkind suspicion, sat down to her task. It was a task; but she got through it bravely, and without so much as her bright eyes being dimmed; and that over, the rest came easy, and she sang song after song as long as she was requested to do so. Hers was not a powerful voice nor an artistic touch, but they were true, clear notes that were very sweet to listen

to, and she accompanied herself upon the guitar quite as well as any amateur ever does upon that instrument. The fact is, she was nearly self-taught. She had commenced music in her school-days with an ardour that promised well for the perfection of the taste which she really possessed, but the style in which they had attempted to teach her had disgusted the girl altogether. Was this the art for which Beethoven and Mozart, and grand old Handel—not to mention scores of others, both ancient and modern—lived, and would almost have died? This, which they tried to translate for her through the medium of a few trumpery ballads, without rhythm in the melody or harmony in the chords, written for the use of young ladies' schools, chosen by the music mistress for the morality of the words alone, and without the slightest regard to the worth of the music? Was the result of all this practice only to consist of a few trumpery polkas and mazurkas—generally the composition of a brother, or father, or uncle of her teacher, whose relations chiefly figured in regimental bands or orchestras,

and of whose productions she was used to have a good stock on hand—or her portfolio of vocal music never to contain other than such songs as, "I love my happy childhood's home;" "Dear native land, good night;" or, "Speak gently to the aged one," &c.? She had commenced her study of the art with an anticipation of pleasure in its pursuit from which keener critics than her second-rate teachers would have prognosticated great things, and urged her on in consequence. But she closed it speedily, loathing the food they offered her, and refusing to learn any more; and if Rachel expressed her disapprobation of a pursuit to Dr. Browne, that was quite sufficient. She was to be troubled with it no longer. So that when she had joined her father in Gibraltar, some three years before, she had considered herself almost ignorant of music. But there was something in the wild sounds of the guitar, and the impassioned strains of Spanish love-songs which struck a chord in Rachel's nature, and assimilated with it. From the first day she had heard the two, united, she had coveted a guitar and a

knowledge of the Spanish language. And she was not long before she possessed both; and the slight remembrance which she retained of the lessons she had received coming back to her aid, she managed by means of it, added to a great deal of enthusiasm for her present pursuit, to make herself a very tolerable musician. She sang all sorts of songs now: Moorish serenades, Neapolitan barcaroles, Spanish chants, and Portugese love-songs; melodies, most of them, like herself, impassioned, wild, and flowing. As she sat this evening upon a low ottoman, her cheeks flushing and paling as her excitement rose and fell—her small hands in the prettiest of attitudes that pretty hands can assume—her flexible voice suiting itself so well to the character of each song she sang, she looked as though she ought never to be separated from her guitar, and probably few other situations would have offered so much display for the various changes which formed the characteristic feature of her mobile face. The evening was spent almost entirely in singing, for its unpleasant commencement

seemed to have given a check to familiar conversation, and then eleven o'clock struck and Rachel remembered that she had promised her father not to be home very late.

"You are off terribly early to-night, carissima," exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, when the fact was announced; "but you mustn't go alone; Captain Craven will see you home, I am sure."

But there had been an expression in Eliza Arundel's face lately, and a tone in her voice, when speaking of Captain Craven and Rachel together, that made the latter shrink from the offer.

"It is out of Captain Craven's way," she answered; "and I thought Major Arundel——"

"I shall be only too proud," commenced poor old Jack, rising as he spoke.

"And so shall I," responded Cecil Craven, as he laughed and rose also.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, almost as if she was annoyed. "Why on earth should you go, Jack, when here is Captain Craven all ready, and you

have had such a hard day's work! It *can* make no difference which goes. Now can it, Rachel? Don't ask Jack, my dearest girl, he is *so* tired."

"Not at all," commenced Major Arundel again, but Rachel interrupted him.

"I couldn't think of it," she said; "in fact, I don't want either of you. I can walk home perfectly well alone."

"*There's* a challenge to your gallantry, Captain Craven," exclaimed Eliza Arundel, as she turned to him.

"I am ready to accept it, as I said before," he answered, gaily. "Mrs. Norreys knows that I would not allow her to return home by herself."

"That's right: of course not," was the reply; "so be off, both of you, and mind you go straight home, and don't mistake your way," she added, laughing, as she pretended to push them gently out into the verandah which surrounded the house.

"I cannot imagine, Eliza," said Major Arundel, in his measured tones, when, having dismissed her friends with a loud "*Buona notte*," she returned to him in the

drawing-room, "why, if, as you say, Craven is flirting with that girl, you should always appear so anxious to leave them together. It isn't as if she was single; I could understand it then; but as matters stand, I should have thought it much kinder in you, as a friend, to——"

He was proceeding in his slow, monotonous manner, to put forth his opinions, which were generally, for all their slowness, anything but foolish ones, when his wife stopped him with a contemptuous "Bah!" pronounced very short, and right in his face, as she stepped behind one of the curtains, and watched the pair in the verandah. They had stopped in order that Cecil Craven might relieve Rachel of her guitar, and as he slung it over one arm, he drew her hand through the other. "Tell me what worries you, Rachel," he said as he did so. They were innocent words enough, but he had said them a minute too soon. He had never called her anything but Mrs. Norreys in public before, and he mistook the surrounding stillness of the night for privacy. As he passed with

Rachel's arm through his own, out of the gloom of the verandah into the moonlit garden, the face which Mrs. Arundel returned from the curtain upon her husband was darker than it need have been, notwithstanding the temerity with which he had exposed himself to her anger by making a remark. The biographer of their married life is not justified, perhaps, in recording a positive assertion on the subject, but it is shrewdly suspected that poor old Jack had doubly earned his title to the commiserative adjectives his friends had prefixed to his name, before the next morning dawned upon Gibraltar.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW SHE BECAME MRS. NORREYS.

But Cecil Craven and Rachel Norreys had passed arm-in-arm from Mrs. Arundel's garden to the public road beyond, without so much as a thought of the jealousy and distrust which followed their exit. The way they had to traverse was a very short one : a couple of hundred yards or so down a steep path, cut in the side of the rock, would bring them to Dr. Browne's villa, and put an end to their communion. Perhaps they both remembered the brief distance with regret as they stepped into the moonlighted pathway, and saw all Gibraltar lying beneath them, wrapt in a grand silence. The whole station seemed

asleep: look on which side they chose, there was nothing living to be descried or heard, except, perhaps, the measured tread of a sentry some little distance below them, or the distant bleat of a goat on the heights above as she roused herself to the semi-consciousness that whilst she slept her kid had strayed from her side. The air was balmy, but cool, and the scent of a few night-flowers, too heavy by day, appeared refreshingly sweet now, in the absence of the sunshine. It was a night for a long walk, a night for unlimited confidences; a night for tears which had no sting in them; for kisses which were all truth—a night, in short, for love, and love alone. Cecil Craven appeared to feel the influence of the surrounding atmosphere, for as he found himself alone with Rachel Norreys, he repeated the question he had asked her beneath the verandah, and this time with increased emphasis, and an accent of greater entreaty. "What made you cry, Rachel? tell me all about it."

It was so good to feel the pressure of his strong arm, as he spoke, and to know that

he had said before, he was ready to defend her, if need be, until death: it was so sweet, so new, to hear the interested voice in which he asked the question; to look up, and, by the moonlight, see his kind eyes bent upon her face as he waited for her answer; to feel that he was young like herself, and that he understood and sympathised with her. And so she told him all; the contents of her husband's letter to her father (her own she had not yet read); her dread of his arrival, of his taking her away from all she cared for; of her never, *never* being able to love him as a wife ought to do.

"For I have even forgotten his face," she wound up with; "it is like being married to a perfect stranger; and oh, Captain Craven, I am so wretched when I think of it."

They had finished their short journey as she spoke, and entered Dr. Browne's garden. Cecil Craven drew her under the shadow of the broad verandah, upon which her bedroom window looked, and stood against the open sill, lest their conversation should

disturb her father, who slept on the opposite side of the house.

"Rachel," he said, as he held the girl before him, "each hour makes me reproach myself more that I ever made that fatal promise; but in trouble or difficulty of any kind, you know where your place ought to be."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, shrinking from him. "I have no right."

"No right!" he echoed; "no one has better; the right of justice and of love. Rachel, I will never take that plea from you; when you wish it, when you are ready, and the world's tussle is becoming too hard for you, remember that my home, wherever it may be, and my affections are open to you."

"Oh, that it might be!" she sighed.

"It is," he answered, emphatically; "and if you will not share the home I now inhabit, I will make one for you. I owe you so much, Rachel, if no more, for the wrong——"

"It is not yours," she interrupted, hastily; "you are not bound to pay off others' debts."

"Yes, I am, when it is my pleasure as well as duty. Only say, Rachel, that you will trust me; that you *do* trust me, and I will be contented."

"I do trust you, Captain Craven."

"Why 'Captain Craven?' Cannot you call me by my name?"

"It seems so soon—so strange," she whispered.

"But you acknowledge my right to ask it?"

"Yes."

"Then say it, Rachel, and I shall better feel that you belong to me."

"Good-night, Cecil," and she gave him one of her hands as she said the words, and attempted to take her guitar from him with the other. But he held it behind his back.

"Not without a pledge of my right," he exclaimed, as he bent his face towards hers. But she started backwards, and coloured violently.

"Oh, no," she said; "not that."

"Why not that, with the other?" he asked.

"Because the other is enough," she re-

plied, but, recovering her composure, added archly, "for to-night."

"Then you shan't have your guitar," he rejoined.

"Then you may carry it home with you," she said, and entered the house, laughing as she spoke. And after a moment's pause, he put the instrument through the open window into the bedroom, and took his way again through the garden, whistling as he went.

She prepared to enter her room after this little passage of arms, almost gaily. She was too young and too imaginative to be left face to face with the anticipation of trouble long: a laugh, however slight, did her good, and acted like a condial on her drooping spirits. A lamp was burning in her bedroom; and when she first entered the verandah, she had glanced in to see that it was empty, and thought it was so. Now, however, she proved herself to have been mistaken; for as she turned the handle of the door, a tall, gaunt figure rose up from a chair which was concealed from the outside by the bed-furniture, and

silently attended her pleasure. It was Caroline Wilson, the waiting-woman.

So unexpected, so unusual a sight, was this apparition, that Rachel almost exclaimed aloud as it first met her view. Then, as the individuality of the creation before her struck her senses, and the knowledge that the woman must have overheard all the bantering conversation which had taken place in the verandah, dawned upon her mind, her surprise turned to indignation, and her indignation knew no bounds.

"What on earth are you doing here, Caroline?" she said, angrily; "who told you to sit up for me to-night?"

"No one, ma'am," was the mild reply; "but I thought I might be of service to you whilst undressing."

"When you know that I never require you, dressing or undressing, and have never let you touch me yet! I don't believe it. I believe you have been employing your time opening all my drawers and pulling about my things. I will not have it, Caroline—I will stand it no longer. I have given orders that my room is to be

held private, and I will have no one sneaking about the house and acting as spy upon every occasion. You have guessed my mind upon the subject before this, and now you know it."

The servant had stood perfectly quiet during this harangue without moving, so much as a muscle of her face. Now she stooped and picked up a handkerchief Rachel had let fall during her heated words, and returned it to her mistress with a half-curtsey before she made her respectful answer.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," she said, "that I should have been so unfortunate as to offend you by my over-desire to save you trouble. I had no intention of making you angry, nor had I received any direct orders this evening not to sit up for you. Your own bedroom was the most suitable place, I thought, for me to await your return; and if I had not fallen to sleep in my chair, I should have risen to apprize you of my presence as soon as I heard your step in the garden. But if you really have so bad an opinion of me, ma'am, perhaps I had

better leave your service; but on account of the little likelihood that there is of the poor doctor lasting much longer, I——"

"There, there!" interrupted Rachel, "that will do; I don't need your services, and you can go to bed. When I *do* want you, you may be sure I shall always let you know."

What the woman had last said, smote her bitterly. Every one seemed to add their confirmation to the dread she entertained of her father's approaching death. She had forgotten him—that dear sick father—when she had spoken so sharply to her waiting-woman. She had quite forgotten (how could she have done so?) that he had said only this evening that Caroline Wilson was necessary to his comfort. Go! of course she must not go, not if Rachel had to ask her, herself, to stay. And, after all, she may have been hasty; she had no proofs that the woman was doing anything but what she considered her duty, in sitting up for her mistress's return. Oh, she was hasty, a great deal too much so, her father had always said it; how sorry she felt

when she thought of it, and yet she could not disconnect a dark and disagreeable doubt with Caroline Wilson's sinister eyes, and unnaturally respectful demeanour; and with the doubt came back the remembrance that she must have overheard the conversation between Cecil Craven and herself in the verandah. She did not believe she had been asleep; she did not look the least as if she had been asleep; she must have overheard it, she was confident; and then Rachel fell to attempting to recall exactly what had been said, and to surmise what use this women could make of her knowledge, if she was disposed to make any use of it at all.

As she sat before the looking-glass thinking thus, whilst her rippling chesnut hair fell in a perfect glory over her white dressing-gown, her eye fell upon the letter which she had received that afternoon and thrown aside unopened, which she had pushed beneath the stand of the toilet-glass impatiently, and now, almost as impatiently, drew forth again, as a corner of the thin blue envelope caught her eye. It had been

forwarded to Gibraltar under cover by her mother-in-law, to whose care it had been sent, and the address, written in a free manly hand, ran thus :—

"Mrs. Raymond Norreys
(Care of Mrs. Norreys),
Abbey Lodge,
Brompton,
England."

There was nothing to provoke any feeling but that of admiration in the writing, which, if one can judge character by such signs, betokened an off-hand and decided one; yet the girl to whom it was addressed scarcely glanced at the superscription on the cover, but tore it open and dashed through it contents as if they were not worth time or consideration.

They were as follows :—

"H.M.S. 'Agincourt,' Port Natal,
"March 31st, 18—.

"My dearest Rachel,

"We have been lying idle here for so many months, that I can scarcely believe that we have received our sailing-orders at

last, and that by this time to-morrow we shall be on our way home; but it is really true, and as we are all very busy in consequence, I have only time to write a few lines, that the good news may go to you by the next mail. When you receive this, I ought to be more than half way to you, and I hope it may find the 3rd in England again, and that the first face of welcome I see in Abbey Lodge may be that of my pretty Rachel; for though we have been separated for so many cruel years, I have never forgotten it, dearest, nor ceased to long for the moment when I shall see it again.

"Since we parted, I have often made myself wretched by the thought that had I only foreseen that five years would elapse before I could return to claim you for my wife, I never should have been guilty of the injustice of binding you to me by marriage; but since they are now so nearly over, I will try to think that 'all's well that ends well,' and to look forward to nothing but a long spell of happiness with my dear girl. And now, my darling, I

have not a moment more to spare. I hope this will be the last letter I shall write to you for a long time to come, and that when we next find ourselves apart, I shall have a better right than I have now to sign myself

"Your devoted husband,

"RAYMOND NORREYS."

"P.S. I am bringing home such lots of pretty things for my dear wife from China and the Cape, and all manner of queer places."

But the promise of "lots of pretty things" did not seem to have the effect upon Rachel that it would have done upon most girls of her age. Indeed, it is doubtful if her eyes ever travelled as far as the postscript, so fixed were they upon the latter sentence, and signature of her letter, her "devoted husband"—her husband—his wife. Although for five years she had known the fact, she had never seemed to grasp the meaning of the words until now. With it arose a sickly fear and dread—almost a great disgust. She sat for a few minutes

motionless, looking at the reflection of her own face, from which all colour had fled, in the glass, and at first it seemed possible to mould her future for herself, and with the thought, her impulse was to tear her letter into a dozen pieces.

"His wife!" she exclaimed. "Never!—not for a thousand worlds! I will *not* be his wife—I will tell him so directly we meet. I will beg my bread first!—I will——"

But here a sense of the impotency of her rage, of the impossibility (however fine it sounded theoretically) of a woman born and brought up as a lady begging her bread,—of the onus that would attach to her, bearing the name she did, if she refused to fulfil her duty—all broke upon the mind of the bewildered girl at once, and altered her demeanour. She rose from her chair half frightened at her discovery—looked at her own reflection in the glass with eyes full of the deepest compassion—took one step forward, as if she were half blind—and then, gaining the bedside, sunk on her knees upon the floor, and sobbed as if her heart

would break. Ah! if Raymond Norreys could only have seen her then, he who, having reached England with a "fair wind and a flowing tide," was at that very moment impatiently awaiting the paying off of his ship at Spithead, anxious for nothing but liberty to rush to Gibraltar and fold the woman in his arms who was now by her actions silently cursing the destiny which had linked her fate with his. For it seemed, indeed, on looking backward, as if Destiny had behaved worse than usual in linking these two so firmly together before they scarcely knew the nature of the obligations they took upon themselves. She had been extremely young at the time, as dates have already shown—only sixteen, and he, the husband, but five years older than herself. And it had happened on this wise :—

Dr. Browne had been stationed with his regiment at Portsmouth, and had placed Rachel at a finishing school at Southsea, that he might see his little girl as often as he felt inclined. A school, which was like too many others of the same class, where a few flimsy accomplishments were taken in,

at the cost of a large annual expenditure, and the natural modesty of the pupils; for no one who has not searched into the subject, and paid it great and personal attention, can have any conception of the folly, the indelicacy, and the wrong which go on among a number of young people brought together from mixed society and homes, and left, during the hours not devoted to study, to amuse themselves.

The finishing establishment to which Rachel Norreys was consigned was no better than the generality of such. Dr. Browne loved the girl devotedly; but he was not keen-sighted enough to espy the evils to which she would be subjected—nor, indeed, are nine parents out of ten in the present day. The convenience of the arrangement is all that they think of; and the topics to which I allude are not precisely such as a young girl chooses, upon which to make a confidante of her mother or father. So Rachel received instruction from various masters in drawing, dancing, and music; attended classes for French, and German, and Italian; and spent six hours at least

out of the twelve in discussing love and marriage, lovers and husbands, liaïsons and elopements, and other equally interesting but perhaps less mentionable subjects, with the young ladies of the school, who were only too pleased to have a fresh mind to sully, and to be witness to the blushing surprise, the exclamations of horror, the impossibility of belief, which innocent Rachel first gave expression to, and to see it gradually replaced by an entire conversion, and a capability of talking upon any subject without blushing at all. Not that I mean to intimate that my heroine became immodest (for the adjective in its extreme sense is a hard one) under the process; she only experienced what almost every schoolgirl is subjected to, that is to say, she had her eyes opened long before the world and her senses would have opened them for her. And the consequence of such violence is, that the next necessity for young ladies, after talking of lovers, is to possess lovers themselves; and Rachel Browne was about the only girl in the school so unprovided when Raymond Norreys became acquainted

with her, and it must be said, for his age, laid very spirited siege to the unused citadel of her heart.

The lad—at this time a promising youth, nothing more—was known to Dr. Browne, and had often met Rachel at his house on a Saturday afternoon—the good doctor little suspecting that the flirtation he saw them carry on was anything but a boy's and girl's nonsense.

He had been acquainted with the parents of Raymond Norreys in times gone by, and liked the young fellow for the sake of his father, who was dead, and whom he greatly resembled. Raymond, who had entered the Royal Navy at his own request, and who had already made one cruise, was passing the interval of his being appointed to another ship in studying navigation (or something still more important, perhaps) in one of the training-vessels in Portsmouth harbour. But much of his time was spent on shore, and much in loitering about Dr. Browne's house; yet, until one bright morning in July, when the news came upon him like a thunder-clap, the doctor

had had no more idea that Raymond Norreys' love for his daughter was likely to prove a serious affair, than any one else would do from the few words which have already been written on the subject here. But on that morning the proprietress of the establishment at which Rachel was imbibing so many foolish and wrong ideas drove up to Dr. Browne's house in a hackney cab, accompanied by her sister, a couple of teachers, and an unlimited supply of pocket-handkerchiefs and smelling-salts, and burst upon him with the awful intelligence that his daughter had been pronounced "missing" from her house that morning, and that no one knew where she was gone; but that some of her companions, frightened at her temerity at really carrying out what she had threatened to do, had confessed that they had heard her say she was going to have a runaway marriage with Mr. Raymond Norreys.

In a brief retrospect like the present it is impossible and unnecessary to describe the scene which followed such a disclosure. Dr. Browne was a man of action. It was

not then ten o'clock: he knew the only thing to be done was to follow the fugitives, so he only allowed himself time to consign the fainting lady proprietress to an unmentionable place to her face, which so surprised her, that she quite recovered from the swoon she was just about to indulge in, before he rushed frantically from the house, and was at the railway station in less than no time, making inquiries on all sides. Here his task became easy. The young lady and gentleman had been observed by several of the officials; their destination, some fifty miles off, was known; and all poor Dr. Browne had to do was to sit down and wait for the next train.

When it started it conveyed him, in less than three hours after he had first heard the news, to a small country place, with only one church in it and one inn. He went to the latter first, and found the newly-married couple sitting very close together on a horse-hair sofa, and awaiting the appearance of the dinner they had ordered. The meeting was not a very formidable one. Dr. Browne had only to open the inn-par-

lour door, and to show his kind, sad face inside it, when there was a cry almost of joy, a bound forward, and a slight figure was folded in his arms, saying, "Oh, papa, I am so sorry! I will never do it again! Oh, papa, darling, do forgive me!"—and the tacit forgiveness came almost as she spoke in a shower of kisses from the dear lips above her hidden face. But it was to the young husband that the father refused to hold out a hand, or to speak, except in tones of the greatest severity.

"Do you know what you have done, sir, in sneaking in this manner into an honourable man's house, and stealing the best thing he had there? Are you aware that you have sullied this child's name in a manner that years may not wipe out?"

But the lad would not be cowed: he looked infinitely proud as he replied,—.

"I am not aware how I can sully the name of Browne by exchanging it for that of Norreys, sir—though I acknowledge I have been very wrong in persuading Rachel to this step. Yet she is my wife now—and no woman need be ashamed of being so."

God bless the boy! He might have been fifty, and a duke into the bargain, to seen the flashing of his eager eyes as the words passed his lips.

Dr. Browne's heart relented towards him as he watched his manly bearing, but he would not show it.

"Your wife!" he repeated. "Do you know, Mr. Norreys, that my daughter is under age, and, having been married without the consent of parents or guardians, can have her marriage put aside, if I choose to do so."

Raymond grew pale, and took a step forward.

"But you will not choose it, sir: you will not have it disannulled. I am of age, Dr. Browne. I will guard her faithfully if you will trust her to me."

"And why couldn't you have come to me like an honest lad, and told me so to my face, instead of persuading this child to outrage every law of obedience and decency, and to run away from a father who never said *no!* to her slightest wish, as if he was a tyrant——." But here he was

interrupted by Rachel's sobs as she clasped him tighter round the neck.

"Don't, papa; don't say that! I will go back with you, papa. I will live at home with you for ever; only don't say words like those."

Dr. Browne replied, tenderly, "Will you go back with me, Rachel?—will you give up this boy for your old father again?"

"Yes, I will—I will!" she exclaimed, convulsively, as she clung to him the tighter.

"And you, young gentleman—will you consent to this folly being as if it had never been, and let this girl return quietly home with me?"

"Never!" exclaimed Raymond Norreys. "She has told me that she loves me; she has become my wife of her own free will. I never give her up with mine."

Dr. Browne admired the spirit which dictated the words, though he professed to resent it.

"Then I shall apply to the law," he answered, "to restore my daughter to me."

"Rachel: you will not leave me," said the young man, as he tried to approach the girl, and to take her hand. The tones of her lover's voice roused her, and she attempted an appeal to her father. Energetic at sixteen as she was at one-and-twenty, she spoke and felt like a woman instead of a child.

"Papa, I love him: we have been very foolish and wicked—but I thought it such a fine thing to be married; and we knew you would never consent whilst I was so young. But don't separate us, papa; he is soon going away on a long voyage. Let me be his wife, and I will live at home with you, and still be your little daughter for all the years that he will be away."

Alas! womanly as were her words, she was too much of a child yet to know how long those years might prove, nor how her heart and mind might alter in that time. But Dr. Browne felt that they both waited for his fiat. They had been foolish, but they were children, and foolishness was bound up in their hearts; and, besides, he had never refused Rachel any-

thing: yet he dared not decide by himself. He put his girl upon the sofa, with a sigh, and told Raymond Norreys that he wished to speak to him alone. As they left the inn together, he said: "Raymond, before I give you a definite answer, I must have counsel upon this subject. Rachel has other friends besides myself, and I should wish to have the advice of her family before I decide. Perhaps you also had better communicate with your mother, Raymond."

"Thank you; I am of age," was the only reply.

"Anyway, I should prefer your giving me your company until this matter is settled."

The young man's pride was touched at this request; but he remembered what might be the consequences if he objected to it, and therefore prepared to walk by Dr. Browne's side to the station. There they spent a miserable couple of hours together, whilst messages to parties unknown that must have cost pounds in the conveyance, went fluttering up and down the

telegraphic wires, and Dr. Browne watched their departure and awaited their advent always in the same position, with his face buried in his hands, and in total silence. At length the last message had been received, and the elder gentleman intimated his intention of returning to the inn. When there, he took his daughter into the shelter of his embrace, and thus addressed her lover :—

" Raymond Norreys, my daughter's relations perfectly coincide with me in the justice of the offer I am about to make you. You have tried to take her from us by stealth, but you have failed. Yet, in consideration of your youth, and the family from which you spring " (for the lad came of a first-rate stock), " we are disposed to overlook the offence on one condition—that you permit Rachel to return home quietly with me ; that you join the ship to which you are appointed with all speed, and do not attempt to claim her as your wife until you return from this cruise."

" Not for a few weeks, sir !" exclaimed Raymond, his colour going and coming as

he spoke. May I not have my wife until I start? It is rather hard——"

"Rather hard!" interrupted the doctor; "when I have the power to take her from you altogether. What do you mean?"

"I suppose I must submit," the boy rejoined; "but I love her, and it *is* hard. Rachel, darling, you won't forget that you are my wife, although they tear you from me."

She turned as he spoke and rushed into his arms, and as he showered his young hot kisses upon her face and head and hands, Dr. Browne wished to heaven that he could feel it right to give them to one another. But his love for Rachel was great, and he remained firm.

"Now, Norreys," he said, "be a man, and let her go. You shall see her as often as you choose until you sail, and you'll be back again to claim her before you have a proper beard upon your chin."

Sorry comfort! but they had to accept it. The boy gave her up; and until he sailed for China and the Archipelago, a month afterwards, he never saw his wife

except in her father's presence. Then she was sent to a school in London, where she was known only by her maiden name; and it was not until the 3rd Royal Bays were under orders for Gibraltar that Dr. Browne had her home, and introduced her to his regiment as Mrs. Norreys. She was then only a girl of eighteen, and yet the image of her young husband was already beginning to fade in her memory. The fact is, she had never loved him as he loved her. She had, as she told her father, "thought it fine to be married;"—something to crow about over the school-girls of her acquaintance; and as she crept upwards to woman's estate, the truth sorrowfully dawned upon her that she had made a great mistake. And it was an aggravation to the misery of her discovery (as every woman will acknowledge) to feel that Raymond still loved her, had always done so, and fully expected that she loved him in return. And this was what was rushing through her mind as she knelt sobbing by the bedside on the evening that we left her.

CHAPTER V.

A SPY IN THE CAMP.

It was some time before Rachel rose from that self-abased attitude, and prepared to seek her bed: she had too much to think about, too much to weep over to allow the tempest of her grief to expend itself quickly. When at length it was exhausted, and she tried to compose herself to sleep, her eyelids were hot and swollen, and her whole body feverish, so that the night was well advanced before she succeeded in attaining her object; and when she did sleep, it was heavily; and although she was half conscious several times, during the early morning, of a footstep moving about her room,

she never roused herself entirely until the sun was shining brightly into the half-closed Venetian shutters of her window, and so fervently as to warn her at once that, whatever the hour, it was late compared to her usual time of rising.

But still she lay, for a few minutes, unwilling to move. Her eyelids felt stiff, her eyes half their usual size; and there was a languor pervading her whole frame, which made her search for the cause. Then the remembrance of her last night's trouble, of her husband's return, and her father's illness, all flashed upon her, and with it came entire wakefulness, and she rose quickly and threw on her dressing-gown, with the intention of going to Dr. Browne's room. It was her custom to do so directly she waked, to learn what kind of a night he had passed. But as she prepared to cross the drawing-room, she heard voices on the opposite side of the house, and paused. The villa which Dr. Browne occupied was built very similar to most houses in warm climates. It consisted of some five or six rooms, all large and airy, but built on the same floor, and

opening one into the other, by means of more doors and windows than we in England, making "draughts" the bêtes-noirs of our existence, could conceive it possible to live amongst. Of these apartments the two centre ones were the drawing and dining-rooms, and the bedrooms were at the sides. All round the house there ran a broad verandah, sheltering the windows of the various rooms, without which they would have been insupportable in the hottest part of the day, even without the aid of their green jalousies. The window-sills were very low, and the large windows usually stood wide open, even at night, so that the verandah itself, with its pleasant screen of over-hanging creepers, and its array of little tables and lounging chairs, seemed almost like part of the rooms which opened upon it. But to gain access to the side of the villa which Dr. Browne, with his attendants, occupied, Rachel must cross the drawing-room; and there were other voices to be heard beside those of her father and Caroline Wilson; and she was in her dressing-gown, and so she stopped to

listen. Soon she distinguished the tones of Dr. Harris, the other regimental surgeon, and that of some one else blended with it, and they alarmed her. Why was Dr. Harris there so early? He was used to call about twelve every morning, but it could not be that time yet. Her watch lay on the toilet-table, but in her distress of the previous night she had forgotten to wind it up, and it was useless. And so she rang a hand-bell which stood there, violently, and it brought Caroline Wilson in another minute to her side; her apparently imperturbable features bearing no trace that she had any remembrance of the words with which her mistress had separated from her the evening before.

"Caroline," said Rachel, anxiously; "who is in papa's room? Is anything the matter?"

"Only Dr. Harris, ma'am, and Captain Craven. The Doctor passed rather a restless night, and so Barnes and I thought it advisable for Dr. Harris to see him earlier than usual this morning."

"What o'clock is it?"

"Just gone ten, ma'am. Will you please to have your breakfast in here? You've had a long sleep, ma'am; and yet you weren't to say up late last night."

Rachel appeared to take no notice of the interest expressed in the foregoing words, but followed up her former question with another.

"What does Dr. Harris say about papa, Caroline?"

"I have not heard the doctor make any remark, ma'am, at least not to me. He told Barnes that master must have plenty of stimulants."

"Why did Captain Craven come with Dr. Harris?"

The woman's lips pursed together in a moment.

"That I am sure I cannot venture to say, ma'am. I can't account for any of Captain Craven's movements, his comings or his goings; he walked in at the same time as Dr. Harris did."

Rachel was vexed with herself for having asked the question.

"I must see Dr. Harris," she continued.

"Ask him, Caroline, before he goes, to step in here to speak to me."

"Yes, ma'am. Won't you let me bring you some breakfast into your room?"

"A cup of coffee—nothing more: I couldn't eat." And then her servant took her departure, and the girl was left alone to spend the moments in suspense until Dr. Harris should make his appearance, and one way or another set her doubts at rest, for she was determined she must know the truth; she could not fight any longer against the sickly doubt and dread which assailed her every time her father spoke of himself, or others spoke of him. And so she arranged her habiliments a little more carefully, and set her room in order, and tried to beguile the time until the door of her father's bedroom should unclose again. It seemed a long time first, but at last the welcome sound was audible. She heard the door open, and the gentlemen come out, and when they had advanced into the drawing-room, they were evidently stopped by the voice of Caroline Wilson, which said:

"May I ask how you find my poor master to-day, sir?"

The answer was given in so low a tone that the eager listener could not catch the words.

"Miss Rachel wants to speak to you, sir, before you go; she is still in her bedroom. That way, if you please."

And then the steady tread of Dr. Harris approached her door, and she knew it would soon be over. Dr. Harris was a younger man than Dr. Browne, but considered much higher in his profession. He was very skilled and very kind, and Rachel had perfect faith in him. So that when she caught sight of the sorrowfully grave expression of his face, and felt the sympathetic pressure of his hand, as he took his seat beside her on the sofa, she guessed what the answer to her question would be, and her hands went up immediately to shut the light of day out from her face. There was no need for Dr. Harris to ask why she wished to see him, he knew it as soon as he saw the inquiring glance in the eyes with which she turned to greet him; he did not even profess to do

so ; to gain himself time for his sad news, he only said—

"Try not to grieve about it, Mrs. Norreys, more than you can help. You have others to think of as well as yourself."

"Oh, Dr. Harris! is it really, really true, then? Is he so very ill as he said himself he was?"

Dr. Harris knew the character he had to deal with: he felt this was no weak foolish creature who would swallow a compassionate lie until the last, and consent to be deceived till Death was actually in the house. And if she had been one on whom it was easy to practise deception, Rachel Norreys' disposition was not of that order to bear the shock of a sudden grief with impunity to itself. She was too nervous —by which is meant, not that she was timid (the general acceptation of the term), but that her nerves were too finely strung to bear a great wrench; she was not a woman to sit down patiently with sorrow and look it in the face, and so Dr. Harris knew that for physical as well as other reasons, it was best she should be told

at once the worst that was in store for her.

"He is *very ill*," was therefore the only reply he made to her question.

"Dr. Harris, is he dying? tell me the truth; I can bear anything sooner than this suspense, only tell me the truth quickly, and put me out of my pain."

"I *will* tell you, Mrs. Norreys, because I know you have a brave heart and can bear anything that Heaven sends you: I deeply grieve to say it, but it is only too true—your father is dying. I did not lose hope myself until this morning, but so rapid a change has taken place during the night that I must not deceive myself or you any more. He cannot last much longer now."

Rachel was looking at him as if she waited for the fiat of her own life or death from his lips. Hers were parted with suspense, and her face, swollen and haggard from the indulgence of her tears the night before, seemed to have lost all trace of its usual vivacity or youth.

"How long?" she gasped, rather than said.

"Two or three days," was the compassionate answer, "not more, Mrs. Norreys, perhaps not so much. Now cry, there's a dear girl, and it will do you good."

He had children of his own, and as he saw the look of silent agony steal over Rachel's face, he could not help wondering if, some ten years hence, his boys and girls, with the capability of men and women for suffering, should be listening to the same decree respecting himself, with the same mute expression of hopelessness creeping over their merry faces. But Rachel ignored his advice.

"Please leave me," she said, faintly; "I am very much obliged to you. I thank you very much, but I must be alone or this will kill me."

Her tones were too earnest, too real to be disregarded, and simply pressing the hand he held before releasing it, Dr. Harris rose without further comment, and left the room. As he passed into the verandah, Captain Craven started up from a chair upon which he had been lounging.

"Have you told her?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

"And how does she bear it?"

"Just as you might imagine such a deep-feeling heart would bear it — without a word. I'd almost as soon have had the task of putting a knife into her throat. God help her, poor child!"

"Are you going home now, Harris?"

"Yes, I can be of no use here. I shall be back in a couple of hours. Where are you bound to?"

"I shall stay here for a little while," said Cecil Craven, reseating himself; "I don't feel as if I could leave the house just yet."

"All right, good-bye;" and then he was left alone to grieve for the young heart grieving within. And she *was* grieving: she sat like a statue of stone; not even the knowledge that her father's life was fast slipping away, and that soon she should no longer have the power of seeking his presence, could enable her to shake off the torpor which had crept over her at the

confirmation of the news which she had dreaded. Dead—in two or three days at furthest—her father—her loving, indulgent, gentle father—dead!

At the thought of his gentleness, his patience, his child-like gratitude for simple offices done for him during his illness, the tears which had refused to rise at the vision of her own despair, commenced to trickle down Rachel's cheeks—to fill her heavy swollen eyes again, making the feverish eyelids smart as they ran over them, to trickle slowly down the stained cheeks and to rest about the fallen mouth without so much as a hand raised to wipe them away. Caroline Wilson entered at this time with the ordered coffee, and seemed about to speak, but the look on her mistress's face stopped even her tongue, and she left the room again without a word. But her appearance roused another train of thought in Rachel's bosom, and self-reproach began to take the upper hand, as she wondered how she could ever have wasted a thought upon such folly as a servant's shortcomings, when this great grief (before which

even that of her husband's return paled) was marching down upon her—this grief, so vast, so awful, so immeasurably sharp. With the thought her stony stage was conquered. An echo of the fervent wish Dr. Harris had expressed for her, a great cry of "God help me!" from her lips, and then the tears came down like rain, and the shock had lost its first power. The exclamation reached the ears of Cecil Craven in the verandah; he had been listening anxiously for some token of distress before that, and he hailed the sound almost with pleasure. For though he could not understand the feverish excitability of Rachel's character, he could sympathize in it because it was hers, and Dr. Harris's word respecting her silent reception of his news had frightened him. But with the knowledge of her distress, a strong wish came on him to attempt her consolation; and so he crept closer to the closed Venetian shutters of her room, and peeped through them, calling softly,

"Rachel! dear Rachel! I am here."

She raised her head from the sofa-

cushion as she heard his words, and through all her trouble felt thankful for the unexpected sympathy.

"Oh, Cecil!" she exclaimed, "it will kill me!"

Her voluntary mention of his Christian name encouraged him so far, that he pushed the blind more to one side, and thrust his handsome head into full view.

"I am so very sorry for you, Rachel!"

"I am sure you are," was her reply, "and it is so comforting to feel you are. God bless you for it!"

This was still more encouraging than the last remark, and consequently, Captain Craven, who never needed much encouragement to do anything where a pretty woman was concerned, lifted his right leg over the window-sill, followed it by his left, and entered Rachel's bedroom. At another time she would certainly have remonstrated with him on his forwardness, but this seemed no moment for an exhibition of prudery. She did put in a faint protest to the effect that he ought not to have come there, but before the words were well out

of her mouth, her head was again buried in the cushion, and he was on the sofa beside her trying to get possession of her hand, and begging her, by everything he could think of, not to make him so miserable by the exhibition of her tears. He looked very handsome and affectionate as he pleaded thus, and although his arguments did not possess much sense, and would not have borne much sifting, they sounded very comfortable to listen to. He was dressed in plain clothes, an indulgence not always obtainable in foreign stations; but beneath the loose, light material that his morning-coat was composed of, an observer might have seen that he wore no waistcoat, on account of the heat; and that a set of rather remarkable-looking gold studs, with his initials in a monogram engraved upon each, and a blue silk handkerchief knotted carelessly about his throat, were all the ornaments that his attire could boast of. His face was flushed, as if he had been much agitated himself inwardly, and his voice, when he spoke to Rachel, was very low and sympathetic. Commonplace words

of comfort at such a moment would only have worried and annoyed her; but the continued entreaty that she would try to compose herself for *his* sake; that she would remember that she could not be unhappy without making *him* so also, bore with them such a pleasing conviction that she had here a friend—that she was not to be really left all alone—that, however much she grieved, she could not be entirely solitary in her sorrow, whilst such words lasted and were true—that her sobs gradually grew less and less, her tears dried, and she sat upright upon the sofa and ceased to catch her breath with every word she uttered.

"That's a dear girl," exclaimed Cecil Craven, with evident satisfaction, as he viewed the effect of his consolation; "now you will be good, won't you, and not cry again?"

"No, I shall not cry again," she replied, sadly. "I have cried myself out."

The young voice was so mournful; the young face looked so weary, that Captain Craven, yielding to a very natural impulse,

bent his lips to hers, and kissed her. She started and coloured, but she did not make the objection to such a proceeding that she had the night before. On the contrary, she said, with an intonation of grateful feeling that came very touchingly from the lips of one who had been accustomed to see men very much at her feet,—"Thank you, dear Cecil; I know you feel for me."

He was half sitting, half lounging over the sofa beside her, as she spoke, and at the same moment the bedroom door appeared to close very softly, as if the sea-breeze had gently blown it to.

Rachel raised her head to listen, like a graceful deer who is startled by the rustling of falling leaves.

"Did any one open the door?" she asked, presently.

"Not that I know of," replied Captain Craven; "at least I didn't hear any one do so. I think it must have been the wind."

But she was not satisfied, and her colour rose. "I think you had better go, Cecil," she said; "I shouldn't like any one to see

you here. I ought not to have let you come in; but you have been such a comfort to me!"

"Let me stay, then," he pleaded, not caring to stir from his comfortable quarters.

"No, no! you must go now," was the answer. "See, I am not even dressed," she added, blushing, "and *he* may want me at any moment. Go, dear friend, and come again to me this evening."

He could not refuse to comply with her request, and, therefore, he stood up. As he did so, she said:

"You have dropped one of your studs; you had better look for it."

"Oh, yes, by Jove," he said, observing the loss. "I shouldn't like to spoil this set; it was my mother's present. It must be on the sofa; perhaps you are sitting on it, Rachel."

She rose, and they searched for the missing stud, but could not see it anywhere.

"It may have rolled under the bed," he suggested, and prepared to go on all fours in order to ascertain if his suggestion was correct.

But Rachel heard the sound of footsteps coming across the sitting-room.

"Oh, do go, Cecil," she exclaimed; "never mind the stud now, I will look for it afterwards; there is somebody coming."

"One minute," he urged, commencing to grovel.

"No, not an instant," she rejoined, in terror, as she pulled at his coat-sleeve; "pray go at once."

The loss of a thousand studs would not have kept him then, for he saw she was really alarmed; so he leapt to his feet and through the open window almost simultaneously, and not too soon, for the next moment a soft tap was heard at the door, and Caroline Wilson entered the room.

"An orderly has come from Mrs. Arundel, if you please, ma'am, and she wishes to know if you are going over there this morning, and your papa has asked for you several times since Dr. Harris went."

Rachel prepared to pass through the open door at once.

"Tell the orderly to wait," she said; "I shall be back directly, and will write a

note," and with that she was gone, and in her father's room.

Mrs. Wilson having delivered the message to Mrs. Arundel's messenger through the open window, commenced, as a notable servant should, to employ the interval of her mistress's absence by setting her bedroom in order. The first object her eye lit upon was the guitar.

"Ah, that has been returned, has it?" she thought to herself; "well, he didn't bring it with him this morning any way, for I saw him come up the garden with Dr. Harris; there's more a going on at times than one thinks for, I fancy, in this house." Having taken up the instrument and set it against another part of the wall, with a vicious thump which can scarcely have been calculated to improve its tone, but probably was intended to improve its morality by showing it that it had no business to have been returned at all, she next proceeded to strip the bed, at the foot of which the sofa stood, and in the act, some of the bedclothes trailing awkwardly upon the floor, Mrs. Wilson stooped to re-arrange

them. Whilst so doing, she appeared to have found some object of interest, for she was a long time on her knees by the bedside, and when she finally resumed her original posture, it was with a look of undisguised triumph on her face and something small in her hand, which, having first well examined by aid of the light, she was very particular in wrapping in paper before she stowed it away in her pocket. In looking about for a piece with which to accomplish her object, she saw the torn sheets of Raymond Norreys' letter, which had been rent in four or five places, crumpled and defaced by passionate hands, and then contemptuously cast on one side to be trampled under foot as they might be. Caroline Wilson picked up one of the pieces, and smoothed out its creases. It happened to be the ending of the letter :—

" I shall write to you
" and that when we next
" ourselves apart, I shall have
" right than I have now to sign myself
" Your devoted husband,
" Raymond Norreys."

She had to read the words over several times, and slowly, before she could quite arrive at their meaning, for she was not a well-educated woman; but it was not the first attempt by many that she had made to master the same handwriting, and, therefore, she soon arrived at the truth.

"This is what we do with our husband's letters, is it?" she said to herself. "This is how we value them? Well, I don't think if I had looked all day I could have found a better piece of paper to wrap my findings in. The two together, small though they be, may turn up yet, when they are least expected to do so. If I'm not mistaken, Mrs. Norreys will come to be sorry some of these fine days that she hasn't treated me with greater civility; till then, I don't lose sight of my little perquisite," and she put the paper and its enclosure safely away as she mused. But her mental soliloquy was here interrupted by the re-entrance of her mistress, with a flushed face, but no further signs of emotion than when she had left the room. She had not touched on the subject of his approaching

death with her father, for Dr. Harris had told her not to do so. The dying man was fully aware that he was dying; he had said so ag ain and again for weeks past, but his strength was nearly all gone, and it was not thought advisable, since he had never directly put the question, to tell him that his end was so near at hand. So, besides a gentle reproof for her red eyes, no allusion had been made to the impending trouble, for which Rachel had been thankful, for she did not feel as if she could have borne any more violent emotion that morning. She was thoroughly exhausted and worn out by the strength of her own feelings. But she was annoyed on her return to find that Mrs. Wilson had thought proper to commence making her bed, and setting her room in order.

"You knew I had not dressed or washed," she said, but not so sharply as she usually spoke to the individual in question. "You might have waited for my orders. You had better go to papa now, in case he wants you, and leave the room until I am out of it."

"Major Arundel's orderly is still waiting for your answer, ma'am," was the mild expostulation.

"Oh, bother it!" exclaimed Rachel, with more impatience than elegance; "bring me my desk then." When it came, she hardly knew, on so little consideration, what to say. She wrote one note, and then tore it up. The fact is, she was not positive as to her interview with Cecil Craven having been quite a private one, and she was diffident of not mentioning it to Mrs. Arundel, for fear the story might be repeated, and her silence on the subject make it appear more than it really was. She was already beginning (almost unconsciously to herself) to feel a little afraid of entirely trusting her bosom friend's good-nature where Captain Craven was concerned. And so her second note spoke openly of the occurrence.

From Mrs. Norreys to Mrs. Arundel.

"Dearest Elise,

"I cannot go to see you this morning, or to-morrow, or perhaps not at all for some

days. I dare say you have seen Dr. Harris by this time, and know all my misery. I feel I can never leave him again for the little while I shall have him with me. I even grudge the few minutes which this note takes me to write.

"Have you seen Captain Craven yet? He was so very kind and good to me this morning, and I scarcely know what I should have done without the comfort he gave me, for poor papa does not yet know Dr. Harris' opinion of his case, so I have to grieve alone. C. C. was naughty enough though to jump in at my bedroom window to talk to me, which he mustn't do again, but I was too unhappy to scold him. If you are near our house to-day, come in, dear Elise, and see your affeetionate

"RACHEL."

It was not long before the orderly brought back an answer to her note.

From Mrs. Arundel to Mrs. Norreys.

"CARISSIMA MIA,

"Jack saw Harris at orderly hour this morning, and heard the sad news. How my

heart bleeds for you, my dearest girl! But you are a naughty little puss to run to Master Cecil Craven for consolation. I have no doubt he was an *immense comfort* to you, and that he found a certain lady's bedroom a very pleasant billet; but that's a sort of game which you mustn't play at too often, Miss Rachel, or you'll find it dangerous. I shouldn't be at all surprised myself if Master C. C. presents himself at the window to-morrow morning again, armed with a fresh stock of consolation. You sly puss! I shall run in and see you, I dare say, this evening. Adio, bellissima. Keep up your spirits.

"Ever your loving

"ELISE."

"Oh, how can Elise write such nonsense at such a time!" sighed poor Rachel, as she tore the effusion of her bosom friend in half, and threw it away. She felt that Mrs. Arundel's words were an insult to her present feelings; she wished she had never been so silly as to tell her anything about Cecil Craven. She might have guessed

that she would not be able to enter into her view of the subject. She felt angry and sore that a joke could be made out of anything at such a miserable epoch of her existence, and so she tore up the note as her only means of expressing her want of sympathy with its contents, and almost hoped, for the first time, that her bosom friend would forget her promise, and not come to see her that evening. She tore up the note and threw it away; but why did she leave it on the floor? In her heedless impetuosity, Rachel Norreys had no forethought in little things; in another moment she had completed her dressing, and proceeded to join her father. The remembrance of her friend's words gave her annoyance, and therefore she imagined she was wise not to give them another thought if she could help it. Whilst in her bedroom she had looked everywhere for Cecil Craven's stud, but without success. That was another subject for worry; she was afraid that Caroline Wilson, notwithstanding her own careful search, might find it in some unexpected corner, and recognise the owner.

But neither of these little troubles occupied her much. How could they whilst she sat, as she did all day, by her father's side, and remembered, as she listened to his voice, how soon it would be hushed for ever? She would have thought about them both a little more, perhaps, could she have seen the look of malice on the face of the waiting-woman, whose capability of revenge she had laughed at and denied, only the day before, as she picked up the severed halves of Mrs. Arundel's foolish note whilst she was finishing the arrangement of her mistress's bedroom, and having read them, put them away safely in company with Cecil Craven's missing stud, and a look in her own eyes which betokened danger.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ARRIVAL AT ABBEY LODGE.

Scattered here and there about Old Brompton, far removed from the newer part of the town, and the noisy traffic of Knightsbridge, may still be seen some few houses whose foundation stones were laid when all that surrounded them was fair, open, smiling country. They are generally grave, substantial-looking buildings, standing back from the road, in gardens of their own, enclosed by high walls, and appearing shy and sensitive and reserved, like well-bred people who find themselves in an atmosphere of vulgarity which is foreign to their nature. Many of them are in a state of decay and dilapidation, being too large

to be kept up except by families of liberal income, and such families preferring a locality more contiguous to the West End. But there are others which are still inhabited by descendants of the man who built them first, when acres of pasture-land and pleasure-garden (long since swallowed up in the great march of civilization, and exchanged for the coin of the building companies) stretched out on either side of them, and there were no shops nearer than Piccadilly, and omnibuses were things unknown.

Abbey Lodge, the residence of Raymond Norreys' mother, was one of these. In it had she and her husband lived all the years of their married life, as his father and mother had done before him, and his grandfather and grandmother before that. There are some families in whom an attachment to locality appears as strongly marked as it is in some animals, as there are others whose only pleasure seems to consist in constant roving about the world. But the Norreys certainly belonged to the former class. They had viewed the rise of the Brompton empire with horror; the inaugu-

ration of omnibuses and cab-stands had nearly paralyzed them; the shops springing up upon every side had destroyed their appetites for months. But they had never dreamt of deserting their old home in consequence. Nothing short of its tumbling down about their ears would have made them do so, and there was not much chance of the Abbey Lodge behaving in that manner, for a more solid structure of grey stone has seldom been seen. Cries of "Charing Cross," and "Bank, sir," of fresh fish and ripe cherries, might go on outside; sounds of cursing and swearing, of solicitations for alms, or importunity for purchase, might commingle with the busy noises of the street, but as soon as one had passed through the blocked iron gate of Abbey Lodge into the still old-fashioned garden beyond, the roar of the thoroughfare became deadened and dull, and an air of well-bred composure prevailed over everything. Mrs. Norreys was very particular about that gate. No persuasions from son or daughter could induce her to have it done away with, and a carriage sweep cut to the hall-

door. She was resolute in her determination to preserve the privacy of the Abbey Lodge intact. If friends called to see her, they must consent to wait at the iron gate until it had been duly unlocked, and then leave their carriages, and walk up the long paved and covered pathway which led to the house. She would have no gate of hers standing open to admit every sunburnt tramp with baby on back who had a basket to sell; every grinning image-boy; and, worse than all, every organ-man who chose to extort money from her, by professing not to understand plain English until he had obtained it. Even covering in the pathway had appeared to her an unholy modernising of the old place; and it was not until her daughter Christine had sprung into womanhood and caught a great many colds, by running backwards and forwards at night to the carriage, whilst it waited to convey her to various places of entertainment, that Mrs. Norreys' motherly solicitude had overbalanced her dread of change, and induced her, since she would not have the carriage drawn up

to the house, to make the house draw up a little closer to the carriage—otherwise the Abbey Lodge was unaltered, from the day that her husband had brought her home there as a bride, excepting that thirty years had heightened its solid beauties by increasing their age. The name which had been given to the house suited it well. Whether it had been so called from its style of architecture, which was decidedly Norman, or whether it had been built on the site where a real abbey once stood (a very probable circumstance), had not been handed down amongst its records, but it appeared more as if it had been erected for the use of some dignitary of the church than anything else, and in the style of the building, whose servant he was. It had heavy mullioned windows, with their arches in the form of hands folded in prayer, and little diamond latticed panes, which Mrs. Norreys would as soon have thought of committing sacrilege, as exchanging for plate-glass windows. The hall door, of solid oak, worn dark by time and use, was of the same date and style as

the windows, and clamped across the outside with massive iron bars, as if there were, indeed, the Holiest of Holies within. But of all old-fashioned things, perhaps an old-fashioned garden is the one most calculated to strike with envy a modern taste; and the few acres—not above four—which remained in the possession of Abbey Lodge, were essentially so. The wall which surrounded it was very high; the trees full-grown and umbrageous, particularly the mulberry and walnut trees, which stood at intervals upon the close-shaven velvet turf, upon which, as yet, no unhallowed game of croquet had been played, desecrating its unbroken verdure with iron hoops and heavy balls, and tramp of many feet. There were not many flowers in the open ground, for though it was possible in a great measure to shut out London noise, there is a certain nuisance, called London smoke, which laughs at high walls, and thick walls, and even at bolts and bars, and comes stealing over everything within ten miles of its influence. And it was too provoking to people who loved flowers as

Mrs. Norreys and her daughter did, to see them spring up, only to turn black and wither; so all their cherished blossoms were kept in the large greenhouse which covered nearly one side of the Abbey Lodge. With a snug brougham, and horses in the stable, which was adjacent, though quite detached from the dwelling-house, one man-servant only, in-doors, (the rest of their establishment consisting of maids) Mrs. Norreys and her daughter had lived a quiet but very comfortable existence during the period of the son and brother's absence at sea. It had been a great trial for the mother to part with her only boy for such an uncertain profession as the navy; but it had been his father's before him, and he was bent upon it, so that she had tried not to regret it, until the imprudent marriage occurred, which had seemed to divide them more than the sea could ever do, and which, she could not help believing still, would never have taken place had they not been separated so early. But Raymond's grandfather and great-grandfather had both been merchants in the City, which accounted for

the liberal income which Mrs. Norreys now enjoyed, and which no one in their senses could ever have suspected to be derived from the royal revenues; and some of their family had chosen to look down upon them for the same, and to have a sneer at trade whenever they chanced to meet them; and Raymond's father was proud and foolish enough to feel the empty taunt, and to refuse, in consequence, to follow the same pursuit. He had not been too proud to use the money earned by trade, however; that, perhaps, would have been too much to expect of anybody; but he declined to make any more by the same means, and entered the Royal Navy as soon as he was eligible for it. And Raymond had inherited his father's ideas and followed his father's example; for it was true that the trade from which they derived their income was the first that had entered the family; and even the great-grandfather and the grandfather had been a little ashamed of themselves, notwithstanding that they felt it to be the best and only course for them to pursue.

For there was a baronetcy in the Norreys' family, and the branch of it who laughed at the City merchants was no less than the branch appertaining to Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise, in the county of Berkshire. It had all grown out of the fact, so unfair, and yet so common amongst English landowners, that whilst the elder brother of the great-grandfather of Raymond Norreys, who was the first to disgrace his family by entering into trade, became "Sir Henry," with the addition of the Berkshire estates, which were strictly entailed in the male line, his younger brother, brought up in the same habits, and accustomed to the same luxuries, was left with the Abbey Lodge, and nothing wherewith to keep it up. Then the great difference between their positions in life divided the brothers, and the introduction of trade by a Norreys, as a means of making bread, divided them still more; and since that time there had never been wanting a young Sir Henry or Sir Charles to step into the baronet's shoes as soon as he deceased. At the present time, the

reigning power was Sir Archibald—a contemporary of Raymond's father, but as unknown to him as Raymond was to Sir Archibald's son and heir, who was reported to be a fine grown, handsome young man. He was the only heir to the title and estate, before Raymond Norreys himself; for his father had been an only child, and had no uncles living. But although it would be folly to deny that Raymond Norreys had never thought upon the probability of such a contingency as his eventually becoming a baronet, he certainly had no more calculated upon its ever being his luck to step into the family title, than had the smallest ship-boy on board the 'Agincourt;' for his father had ever discountenanced such imaginings, and the gap between the elder and younger branches of the family had widened and widened, until they appeared to be no longer of the same blood. Sir Archibald scarcely knew that such a young fellow as Raymond Norreys was in existence, whilst to the descendants of the poor young merchant, the acres of Woolcombe Rise were unknown grounds.

They never heard anything about their grand relations, except through the medium of the newspapers; and had, indeed, almost forgotten that their family consisted of other than themselves and their immediate kith and kin.

It was at the close of a long hot day in the middle of June, when the evening shadows had fallen so considerably as to make a couple of figures, pacing up and down beneath the shade of the trees in the Abbey Lodge garden, appear indistinctly grey, that Mrs. Norreys, alarmed for her daughter's delicate health and aptitude for catching cold, ventured herself beyond the covered pathway, in order to call her into the house.

"Christine, my dear, it is past nine o'clock, and the evening is very chilly. Pray do not stay out any longer, or else let me send you a shawl to put on!"

"No, never mind, mamma, dear, we will come in at once."

"No—send for the shawl," urged her companion, "it is quite warm yet."

"I don't myself think there is much

danger of catching cold to-night," replied Christine, laughing; "but I would rather go in, because mamma will be anxious, whether I am wrapt up or not. Come, Alick."

She ran across the lawn as she spoke, and her companion followed her, though slowly. When she stepped into the lighted hall, and laid her garden hat on one side, she appeared simply a nice-looking girl of two-and-twenty, with dark eyes and hair and a fresh complexion, but there was an appearance of *bonhomie* about her features that was very grateful to turn to in a world like this, where too many faces frown instead of smiling on us.

As Christine passed into the dining-room, which they used of an evening when they were alone, and sitting down upon a low stool by her mother's side, twined her arms about her fondly, it was evident there was a great deal of love and confidence between these two, as there always should be between mother and daughter; and Mrs. Norreys, sitting in the placid lamp-light, looked just such a mother as a

daughter should ever have to turn to. She was a woman of fifty, or more years, and her hair was grey, but she still retained the complexion of a girl, and her quiet eyes seemed as though they never could have flashed with anger, or expressed any feeling, antagonistic to the dictates of a pure and gentle heart.

"Where is Alick?" she asked, as Christine settled herself beside her.

"Outside, I suppose," was the reply; "he followed me, I believe. Alick!"

"Well," said rather a sulky voice from the hall door steps.

"Where are you? Why don't you come in-doors?"

"Thank you, I prefer being where I am."

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Norreys, of her daughter.

Christine shrugged her shoulders: "I don't know; something has put him out again, I suppose."

Mrs. Norreys sighed, and was silent.

The fact is, Mr. Alick Macpherson stood in too important a position in the household for his little tempers (which occurred

rather oftener than was pleasant) to be witnessed with indifference. For he was supposed to be engaged to marry Christine Norreys, although, from his own want of means (he held some appointment in the War Office), it was improbable that the marriage would take place for some time. Yet Christine loved him, and was ready to humour this worst phase of his character, never considering in what, if not checked, it might end.

She was on the doorstep now before another five minutes had elapsed, trying to coax him to do what ought to have been his pleasure.

"Come, dear Alick," she said, in a woman's wheedling way, "don't sit on those cold stones; I am sure you cannot be comfortable. Come in-doors, and I'll play to you."

But Mr. Macpherson neither moved nor spoke.

"What is it, dearest?" she said, as she bent down, and laid her cheek against the top of his head, "is it anything *I've* done?"

At first he insisted in asserting that *it*

was "nothing;" but when she had coaxed and coaxed and fondled it out of him, it appeared that his Royal Highness had taken offence because she preferred complying with her mother's request, and coming in from the garden, to running the risk of taking cold by staying out to make love to him under the mulberry and walnut trees.

"Oh, what a naughty boy!" cried Christine, when she had extracted this confession from him; "what a naughty, sulky, jealous child it is, when you know, dear Alick, that I would rather be with you than anywhere else, but I only did it to please poor mamma. You won't be naughty, Alick, will you? You'll come in now, and let us have a pleasant hour together before you go?"

A good deal more in the same strain and to the same purpose, and Mr. Alexander Macpherson at last consented to abjure solitude, and to make one of the party in-doors. Under the lamplight he appeared a fine-looking young Scotchman enough, though scarcely worth the amount of trouble it

had taken to get him there. He was tall and well-favoured, with the light-reddish hair, blue eyes, and high cheek-bones which form the characteristic features of his race, and tell tales, too often true, of a hot temper. In addition to this, his bearing was gentlemanly when he chose it should be so, and his age was about twenty-four.

They had all assembled at the piano, and were in the midst of Scotch ballads and Scotch jigs, called for by Mr. Macpherson (who, like most of his countrymen, was always ready to take up the gauntlet in support of everything that emanates from Scotland being better than similar produce from any other part of the world), when they were interrupted, but not startled, by a loud peal from the bell at the iron gate.

"Who can that be, mamma?" said Christine, speaking in the midst of variations on "There's nae luck about the house."

"Your dress, home from Elise, probably," was the careless reply as the manservant passed through the open door on his way to answer the summons. But the

indifference did not last long. The iron gate swung back upon its hinges: a voice was heard, loud and decisive, questioning and giving directions, and mother and daughter sprung to their feet simultaneously.

"Mamma, it must be Raymond!" broke from Christine.

"I really think so too," faltered Mrs. Norreys, and her lips turned very white and trembled; for the arrival of H.M.S. 'Agincourt' in the Downs had been signalled more than a week before, and they had been expecting from day to day since to hear that she had been paid off, and to see Raymond burst into the room, with the certainty of a long holiday before him.

"It *is*!" almost shouted Christine, as the firm footsteps trod the paved pathway, and approached the house. She would have dashed into the hall as she spoke, but the mother touched her gently.

"Let me go first, dear." The words were low, and almost entreating, but at the sound Christine drew back directly. She

felt that his mother had the first and best claim to welcome him home.

"Mother!" exclaimed a deep-toned voice, as she reached the hall, and a pair of arms were opened to receive her trembling form, whilst she could only lean against him, and murmur, "Oh, my boy!—my dearest boy! is it really you?"

But as Christine now advanced, thinking her time was come, he gave a sudden start, and left his mother, but stayed his steps as suddenly, saying, with a sigh, "How I had hoped to meet my Rachel here! Are there no letters for me, mother?"

His sister flew into his embrace, and he kissed her, though almost mechanically, looking round the while for his mother's answer.

"None, dear Raymond!—not since the last I forwarded to you."

"Well—well! it doesn't much signify," he said, as he released Christine and walked into the dining-room, but there was a look of the blankest disappointment on his face, nevertheless. The two women followed,

not knowing what to say to comfort him, but he scarcely seemed to notice their action; he drew a chair to the table, and placing his bag upon it, sat down, and leaned his head upon his hand.

"I suppose you have heard all about the poor doctor's illness," remarked Mrs. Norreys, presently. "In his last letter to me he does not seem to have much hope of his own recovery."

"So Rachel tells me, poor child!" replied Raymond; "but sick men are apt to have fancies about themselves. When did you hear last from my wife?"

Mrs. Norreys looked at Christine, and Christine looked at her mother, but neither of them spoke—the truth being that Mrs. Raymond Norreys, although she knew her husband's relations, having spent some time at Abbey Lodge after his departure from England, had never much troubled either her mother or her sister-in-law with epistolary correspondence, and, at the present, months had elapsed since her last communication had arrived.

"The fact is, dear Raymond," said his

mother, after a little while, "Rachel is young, and does not much care about letter-writing, I dare say: few young people do. She was very good last year, but her father's illness, and the life they lead at Gibraltar, and——"

"Well—well! but when did you last hear from her?" interrupted the young husband, with an impatient movement of the foot.

"Not since Christmas, I think; was it not so, Christine?" said Mrs. Norreys, almost timidly, as she appealed to her daughter's memory.

"Last Christmas!" laughed Raymond. "Then I must not come for news to you. Mother, if you will let me know which is to be my room, I'll just run up and make myself presentable, for I am in a dreadful state of disorder now, and I will tell you all you will want to know about myself when I come down again."

Mrs. Norreys proceeded to show him the room at once, to which his luggage had already been conveyed, and then returned, overbrimming with happiness, to see that a substantial repast was prepared to greet

her son with when he should be ready to discuss it.

"He is sure to be hungry, Christine," she said; and the two women made themselves happy, as women can, by taking an immense deal of unnecessary trouble for the creature they loved, whilst Mr. Macpherson, who had felt very much in the way ever since the arrival of the son and brother of the house, crept out of the drawing-room, where he had been amusing himself in the dark by picking out Scotch tunes upon the piano, with one finger, well pleased at emancipation from his own company.

In the meanwhile, Raymond Norreys, instead of making himself presentable as quickly as possible, sat down on the side of his bed, and began thinking. He had been prepared for the fact that he would not meet his young wife at the Abbey Lodge, for he knew that the 3rd Royal Bays had not reached England; and yet, notwithstanding the knowledge, he could not dispel a certain feeling of disappointment at its realization.

For months past he had pleased his fancy by picturing to himself his return to England, and the bright, expressive face of Rachel, as he remembered it, enhanced by all the womanly graces which he had dreamed of her, as year by year attaining, being the first to shine upon him through that old oaken door when he should see it next.

He had hoped, until hope had seemed reality, that the first form his arms should enfold would be that slight young figure which used, even in his boyish days, to seem as nothing in his grasp, and which, they told him now, whilst it had rounded into shapelier and more finished curves, had lost nothing of its grace or suppleness.

His had been no boyish love, no fleeting youthful fancy, for the girl whom he had married. Indeed, it is doubtful if such a character as his, so determined in its course, so straightforward and decided in its actions, could ever have been termed "boyish" in the general acceptation of the word; for there had never been anything simple, or weak, or wavering about Ray-

mond Norreys. He was as energetic as Rachel herself—perhaps as excitable—although he had his feelings far better under control. Although neither of great height or bulk, there was a look and an air about him well calculated to strike a woman's imagination, because well calculated to control her will.

In figure he was of the middle size, perhaps five foot nine, or a little over, but there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his body, and every muscle was firmly knit and well developed. The only feature about him which might have appeared to betoken want of strength was the size of his hands and feet, which, for a man, were small and very shapely. In after-days Mr. Alexander Macpherson was pleased to observe to his fiancée, contemplating at the same time his own gigantic ruby-knuckled fists with apparent satisfaction, that Raymond's hands were only fit for a woman, and he wondered he had ever been able to go up the rigging with them. But there were some people in the world who could have testified that not only the rigging, but

opponents, more sensible of his power, had succumbed to the grasp of those small wrists, thanks to the biceps which aided their hold, and the knowledge of the glorious art of self-defence which their possessor possessed. His head was small and well set upon his shoulders, which, with his chest, were broad for his general size. His hair, jet black, was thick and abundant; but he wore it so closely cut that its thickness was not observable, except to the touch: his eyes were invariably taken for the same colour, but they only turned so when he was excited or angry. In reality they were of a rich dark brown, so variable that their expression could change from a hard, stony, unlifelike gaze to one of velvet softness, as quickly as he could turn his look from the contemplation of a person he cared nothing about and let it rest upon the face of the creature he cherished most upon earth. But in this variableness lay their chief charm, for they were not large eyes, nor particularly handsome ones. They were deeply set, and rather close together, yet without imparting anything like a sly or sinister expression to

his face, for the general idea his appearance conveyed was that of the most rigid straightforwardness.

His nose was small, and his mouth, which from the regulations of the service was fully displayed, was like his eyes, inconstant, but essentially sweet in its seeming when its owner felt sweetly disposed. At present it was compressed, and did not show a single specimen of that phalanx of white and regular teeth with which this enumeration of the excellencies of my hero may cease.

He was not perfect, far from it, but he was exceedingly gentlemanly and sensible-looking, and possessed none of those bearish attributes which it seems to be the fancy of authors to father upon their naval characters, but which are no more to be met with in a well-educated and well-bred officer in that service than a broad and unintelligible brogue is observable in an Irish or Scotch gentleman who has enjoyed the same advantages. At any rate, Raymond Norreys could lay no claim to them; on the contrary, perhaps from a feeling that sailors

are supposed to be ruder and noisier than the rest of society, he was invariably known to be very quiet when there; far more so than when at home, for his disposition was naturally very gay, and often overrunning with spirits.

They did not appear likely to exceed the bounds of decorum, though, on this night of his return to the Abbey Lodge, after five years' absence from it, for his demeanour, as he sat absorbed in his own thoughts, was almost mournful.

"My darling girl!" he said to himself, "I dare say my mother's lectures on propriety have been so strict, and her letters altogether so prosy and so much like sermons, that she has frightened my Rachel into dropping the correspondence altogether. And my dear girl's letters to me lately have not seemed so cheerful and happy as they should have been. I wonder if she misses me, and begins to fret at our long absence; it was a sin to condemn her brightness to five years' widowhood. My pretty bird! I wonder if her soft, sweet eyes are as bright as they used to be, and if she has

quite forgotten all her arch, winning, naughty little ways! Well, I shall soon judge for myself. Thank Heaven, Gibraltar is no distance." And then he fell to pondering on a certain expression which Rachel's eyes had worn when, on their mockery of a marriage day, she had turned from her father's embrace and rushed into his, and held him to her with those graceful, girlish arms, as if she could not let him go. He wondered if she would meet him again just in the same manner: he would like nothing better than to hold her so, and to be able to say to her,—"Rachel, no one can ever separate us again; I have fulfilled my part of the contract, I have come now to claim yours." Would she blush, and hide her sweet face? Would she——

But his wonderings as to what she would do were here cut short by the voice of his sister Christine at the door, inquiring if he were ready to come down to supper. And then he jumped up and smoothed his ruffled hair and washed his hands, and went downstairs very much the same as he had gone up. But now he was Raymond Norreys

again; he had reasoned himself out of his irrational disappointment, and was ready to do his duty amongst his own people. He found time to re-embrace his mother, and ask for her congratulations on their safe reunion; to observe his sister, so grown and altered in the years they had been parted as to be almost unrecognizable, and to be introduced by her, with many blushes, to Mr. Alexander Macpherson, of whom he had already heard. And when they sat down to supper there could hardly have been found a happier, merrier quartette in Brompton, although Mrs. Raymond Norreys was not sitting at her husband's right hand on the festive occasion. But a little communication which Raymond had to make to his mother and sister, and which he had carefully kept back until now, rather threw cold water on the last part of the entertainment.

"I suppose you will be writing to Gibraltar by the next mail, Raymond?" observed his mother about that time; "the steamer goes the day after to-morrow."

"No, I shan't," replied Raymond, but

rather awkwardly, and blushing in his plate as he spoke; for this gentleman, although he had been seven years at sea, had not yet lost the power of blushing at times, and very well he looked when he did it. Mrs. Norreys was about to make some mild remonstrance when her son finished up his sentence—"because I shall be on board of her; I am going to Gibraltar by the next mail."

"Raymond!" cried his mother, and "Oh, Raymond, don't!" came in expostulatory tones from his sister, but he was quite decided.

"What is there to make such a fuss about?" he said, when their horror had a little subsided. "It is nothing of a trip, and I must go to bring my wife over. You forget, my dear mother, that however glad I am to get back to old England and home, —and God only knows how glad I am,— that my first duty is towards Rachel, particularly if, as is likely, from your accounts of my father-in-law's health, she may be in distress and alone. Besides which," he said, warming with his subject, and losing an

habitual shyness he had to speak of any of his inmost feelings in public,—"besides which, it is what I have been dreaming of, and longing for, for five long years. You would be none the better for my staying here, mother; for I fancy I should be anything but an agreeable companion just now, for I should be hankering after Rachel day and night. I've got my leave here from the Admiralty," he concluded, slapping his waistcoat pocket. "They behaved like bricks, and sent it me immediately; and all I have to do is to take my berth, run over to Gib, and bring back my dear little wife to Abbey Lodge as soon as steam will do it all. I'm forgiven, mother, am I not?"

What could they do but forgive him, and admire him all the more for the devotion he showed to the girl he had married in his hot-headed youth! But he was so impatient and restless even during the few hours that intervened before he could start for Gibraltar, that, much as they loved him, his mother and sister were almost thankful when he was at last off. And so Raymond Norreys set out upon his way to claim his

looked-for prize, with Hope making all the future one coming glory to him; and the name of Rachel the magic lullaby which alone could soothe his impatience, and the last word which was each night chased by slumber from his faithful lips.

CHAPTER VII.

RACHEL IS LEFT ALONE.

Dr. Browne did not fulfil Dr. Harris's prediction that he would not last more than three days from the time that the news of his approaching death was broken to his daughter. He survived it for a week. He was excessively feeble,—so much so that, for the last forty-eight hours, he could scarcely be said to live; but yet he was alive. In his younger days he had been a man of great muscular power and with an iron constitution, and his hold on life in consequence was very tenacious. He had wrestled with the Great Enemy for weeks longer than a more ordinary mortal would have done; but the struggling was over at

last, and he succumbed. No one told him that the change was so near; but he seemed to know it by intuition. Perhaps he guessed it by the pertinacity with which Rachel clung to his side, refusing to leave it even for her meals, or if, persuaded by his entreaties, she did so, returning in such haste and with such tell-tale eyes, that her father knew she had only gone away to cry. He may have read the truth in the earnest gaze so often fixed upon him, as if she feared he might fade away and vanish then and there, and leave her to her dreaded loneness before she had realised that he was going; or in her low and gentle voice when she addressed him, so different from her former tone of vivacity. Any way, he knew it; and Rachel felt that he did so, although he never openly mentioned the fact to her,—perhaps because there seemed something sacred in the hushed grief depicted in her face, or that he shrunk in his weak state from changing her forced calmness into one of those storms of passion in which he had so often seen her indulge in the days gone by. Once he had thought of

doing so, for he commenced to say, "Rachel, my child, I want to tell you something;" but she had stopped him with a rain of tears, and sobbing out—

"Oh! don't, papa!—I cannot bear it—I know it all—but do not say the words!"—had fallen on his breast, and hidden her face there, as if with sunshine she would shut out the truth. There had been friends to see her daily during that sad week. Eliza Arundel, of course, with a pompous show of affection, and overrunning with terms of commiseration, making the sick-room rather too noisy with her presence, and Rachel, relieved for her father's sake (notwithstanding that she loved her), when she withdrew it for her usual drive. And later in the evening, when the dews had fallen, and darkness was on the house over which the angel of death was hovering, a heavier but more subdued step would steal into the verandah, and call on Rachel's name, to hear how his old comrade was that night, and, strange to say, tears would come at the kindly pressure of the husband's hand, which the wife's loud tones of pity and as-

surances of affection never possessed the power of raising; and in after-days Rachel always connected her best comfort of that time with poor old Jack Arundel; and when she thought of her lost father, gratefully intertwined the two memories together. Not that Cecil Craven was slow to sympathise with her, or backward in expressing his feelings; but he did not possess the same quiet tact in showing it, and which made Major Arundel's visits after dark almost as congenial to her as might have been a woman's tears. Poor Captain Craven was very desirous to be of use, and very solicitous that he should be employed; but he had never been accustomed to a sick-room, and his tread was, to say the least of it, apparent, and his touch clumsy. But though he always appeared sadly out of place there, and was invariably in the way whenever Rachel wanted anything, and had to shift his position and apologize, yet he could look very commiserating with his soft, sleepy blue eyes, and his moustaches seemed to have drooped even lower than usual during the last week. And Rachel liked to feel a

friend was near her, though he only slept his time away in the verandah, and was sorry when duty or the mess-table called him away, and glad when he joined her solitary meals, and kept her from brooding the whole time upon her coming troubles; so that when the last day came, and Dr. Browne, after lying for nearly forty-eight hours in a species of stupor, suddenly roused himself, and turned his eyes, looking more like his own eyes than they had done for weeks past, upon Rachel, her exclamation of pleasure brought Cecil Craven in from the verandah to learn the cause.

"He is better, Cecil,—I am sure he is,—isn't he, Caroline?" she said, appealing, in her pleased surprise, to the woman to whom she had scarcely spoken in her distress. But Mrs. Wilson only shook her head, and was respectfully silent; and Cecil Craven said, "Be brave, dear Rachel,—this is the time for it."

And then she knew that this was only a temporary rousing, permitted by the bounty of heaven, before her father lay down again to sleep for ever. She was brave,—she did

not cry out, nor lament over her brief hope, so suddenly extinguished; she only crept nearer, and knelt by the dying man's side, and slipped her arm gently beneath his neck, so that his head might rest upon her bosom. Her face was very pale, and her heart beat loudly, but her eyes were dry as she fixed them on those of her father. He knew her, and smiled,—just such a peaceful, happy smile as a child gives when it is sinking safely to sleep in its mother's arms. And then he turned his eyes towards the figure of Caroline Wilson, standing at the foot of his bed, and lifting his feeble hand with an effort, slightly waved it.

"Papa wishes you to leave the room, Caroline," said Rachel, quickly.

"I don't think my master can mean that," rejoined the servant, in rather an offended tone.

"Go," said the sick man convulsively. There was no mistaking his meaning this time, and she left, with a remark on "some people's gratitude" hovering on her tongue.

Then Dr. Browne turned his eyes—again

growing languid—upon Rachel's face, and whispered: "Any one else here?"

"Only Cecil, papa; you don't mind Cecil, do you?"

"I *want* him," he replied, slowly. His words were not indistinct, but each one was forced out with a kind of gasp, as if the tongue was forgetting how to speak. Then Cecil Craven came nearer, and took the hand of his old friend, which was cold and clammy, and utterly powerless, in his grasp.

"I am here, Dr. Browne, close to you."

"Cecil — you have — not — forgotten— swear again—you will never—repeat it—swear by God."

"By God, sir," repeated Cecil Craven, solemnly.

"Rachel, too! Swear, my child."

"I have sworn, father," she said; "I will keep my oath."

"Again—again," he murmured.

"By God, and as I hope for heaven!" she exclaimed, with all the warmth of her enthusiastic nature. "Father, may I never see you again—never meet the look of your dear eyes—never feel the clasp ——. Oh!

my God—my God!" cried the girl, breaking down as the thought of her coming loss pressed upon her, "what shall I do without you?"

The father's eyes—so soon to become insensible and dull—were fixed upon hers, by an influence almost magnetic.

"Love her, Cecil," he said, "*love* her and protect her always—my child—my Rachel!"

Then she laid her wet cheek against his, and called herself by every name she could imagine, for her weak selfishness and want of bravery.

"Forgive me, father," she said, entreatingly, "I am calm now. I am ready to bear anything. Life is not so long, and when we meet again, we shall wonder that we fretted so at the short separation; is it not so, darling?"

But he could not answer her, the power of speech was gone. For nearly an hour she knelt, as she had first placed herself, with her father's head upon her bosom, her arms fondly twined around him. The evening—it was evening time—wore on,

the dying head grew heavier and heavier, chilling with the damps of coming death each fibre in her warm young breast. The dying eyes were dull and blank—and no longer seemed as though they looked at anything; the hands and feet were cold, and a profound stillness reigned on everything around. Every now and then, Rachel's trembling voice might be heard, addressing a fond word to the inanimate figure before her, but her sentences generally died away in tears: at intervals Cecil Craven whispered a little comfort, or pressed her hand, almost as cold as her dying father's, in his own warm clasp. Once, Caroline Wilson entered the room, but was dismissed again by him, with such a rebuke that she did not soon forget it. And then the hour was nearly gone, and Dr. Harris' tread was heard advancing up the garden path to pay his evening visit. Captain Craven rose, as noiselessly as his intractile conformation would permit him to do, and meeting the new-comer in the verandah, gave him in a few words to understand how the case lay. The two gentlemen re-

entered together. Rachel never turned her head at Dr. Harris's approach, but kept her eyes still steadily fixed on those of her father. But the medical man stepped at once to the bedside and lifted the heavy burden from off her bosom to its former resting-place. She attempted to remonstrate with him, but his first words were decisive.

"That is not your father, dear Mrs. Norreys; he is better off than even in your arms."

Then she experienced a second shock, almost as great as if she had not been watching and waiting for this, and this only, for the last week. She suffered Dr. Harris to take the dead form from her embrace; she heard his words and understood them, but she did not move from her kneeling posture.

Not, that is to say, until Cecil Craven put his arms around her and tried to raise her, and whispered something in her ear, which seemed to put new life into her frame.

"Cecil," she said, in a burst of tears as

she rose without assistance, and permitted his arms to entwine her figure and support it. "Cecil—what were his last words? I cannot remember. I did not think he would never speak again."

"Love her, Cecil," he whispered; "love her and protect her always. And I will, Rachel, so help me God!"

She turned her face to his, and calling him by a name too low to be distinguished, suffered him to press his lips upon her forehead, and passed from him to the privacy of her own room. And there she stayeduntil the evening of the next day, when her father's funeral was to take place. No one saw her during that interval, for she would not even admit Caroline Wilson into her presence, nor open the door at the continuous entreaties of Cecil Craven, that she would at least swallow a glass of wine. When the funeral was over; when she knew by the familiar sound of the three volleys fired over the grave that *that* which had been her father, but which she had refused to look at when once she was assured that it was no longer him, was hidden away out

of her sight, and that her eyes could not encounter it, by breaking through her solitude; she unlocked the door of her own accord, and walking into the drawing-room, told Mrs. Wilson to bring her bread and a glass of wine. When it was set before her, she drank one—two, glasses of the sherry patronised by the mess of the 3rd Royal Bays, and felt after it, for the first time that day, that she could trust her voice to speak without breaking down.

The sight of Mrs. Wilson as she stood near her, every now and then passing a finger over moist eyes, aggravated Rachel, and dispersed even the desire for tears in her own. What right had this woman to profess to mourn for her father; she who had served them both, for money only? And there was not a shadow of sympathy in Rachel's voice as she coldly gave her the orders, necessary for her to receive.

"I am going to Mrs. Arundel's to-night. You can pack up my boxes, and send them over there."

"At once, ma'am?"

"Whenever they are ready. I shall go

there as soon as—as they return." The last words came out with an effort, and Rachel applied herself to pouring out wine until it overflowed the glass. She would not give this woman even the opportunity of pitying her. Then she added:

"I wish to tell you, Caroline, that I shall not require your services after to-night. What wages are due to you?"

The servant did not express the least surprise at her summary dismissal. She had expected no less.

"The committee will pay me what is due, ma'am, when it sits. I may consider myself free, then, to enter on any new lady's service to-morrow?"

"Oh! have you got another service?" said Rachel. "I am glad of it." She did not feel sufficient interest in the woman to ask the name of the mistress she had engaged herself to. "Yes; you can go as soon as you have despatched my boxes to Major Arundel's."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Not another word passed between them, of either question or command. Soon after-

wards, Cecil Craven and Dr. Harris entered the room, each with a piece of crape round his arm, and his sword-knot muffled in the same material, and asked if Rachel was ready to accompany them to her friend's house; for it had been a thing agreed by letter between the ladies that morning that Rachel should go and stay with Mrs. Arundel as soon as the funeral was over. There was no need for her to be in the house, for beyond her own personal effects everything that had belonged to Dr. Browne was placed under a seal, and put in the charge of a certain number of his brother-officers, who constituted a committee for settling all his claims and selling all his property. And as the regiment expected to leave Gibraltar so soon, it was doubly necessary that this should be looked after at once. With the exception of her father's watch and chain, his sword, desk, and private papers, which were handed over to his daughter, together with a lock of his hair, thoughtfully enclosed in the desk by Dr. Harris (how thoughtful and good the medical profession can be in times of distress, let

those left alone in foreign countries best testify), everything was to be brought to the hammer at once, and the proceeds to be placed to Rachel's account, as was desired by her father's will. Further than this he had nothing to leave her, for private fortune he had none, and his savings had never been savings long. All the furniture, books, and ornaments; the contents of the stables must be included. Even the pretty galloway which she had always ridden, and which was so especial a favourite of hers, must be knocked down to the highest bidder, only to be re-sold, probably, for the benefit of some lady rider belonging to the relief corps. Not that Rachel cared much about it; she was too sad and indifferent just at that moment to care about anything. She rose when Dr. Harris and Cecil Craven entered, and expressed herself ready to leave the house with them at once.

"I have given the order about my things," she said, "and they will follow me this evening."

She raised her hat, which was lying on the table, to her head, and passed out of the place

which had been her home without another look at anything there. Not one glance at the bedroom so lately made vacant; not one at her own, the harbour, at one time, of so many innocent and happy thoughts. She seemed only too glad to leave them all behind her, and to shut out the sight, as she would wish to do the memory, of past pleasure. But when she stepped into the verandah, there was Barnes, faithful, honest Barnes, who had served the doctor ever since they had together joined the regiment, and who had very suspiciously red eyes, as he now came forward to carry his young mistress' cloak, and to see her put into the pony-chaise. With Caroline Wilson she had been cold; but coldness was no part of Rachel's character. She thrust out her little hand, and suffered it to become absorbed in the hairy, freckled fist of honest Barnes, as she tried to communicate something like a squeeze to his hardened palm.

"Oh, Barnes!" she said, sobbing as her eye met the signs of grief, so evident in his, "I am so much obliged to you for all you have done for him. God bless you, Barnes!"

and then turning to Dr. Harris, she said eagerly, "Dr. Harris, you must let Barnes have the watch and chain; I know *he* would have wished it; and you will always wear them, Barnes, won't you, for his sake and mine?" And then she hurried to the pony-chaise, followed by Barnes, who could not express his gratitude at first, but found courage to say in a low voice, as he folded the wraps about her feet,—

"I shan't forget your goodness, miss: you're every inch like him, and I couldn't say better of you;" and then, fearing he had overstepped the bounds of military etiquette, suddenly drew himself up as if a poker had been thrust down his back, as Dr. Harris and Captain Craven stepped into the little carriage, and stood like a statue, with his hand raised to his forehead, until the pony had been put in motion, and turned the corner which led to Major Arundel's house.

Elise Arundel received her bosom friend with an exuberant display of affection, which was rather too officious to be soothing to a spirit so wounded as was Rachel's.

"Now, my dear girl," she said, as she

followed her into the bedroom prepared for her reception, and Rachel expressed a wish to have "just one cup of tea, and then go to bed." "Now, my dearest Rachel, I cannot allow you to shut yourself up like that. It will do you harm, chérie, and make you worse. What *I* say is, when a thing's over, it's over; and it's no use remembering it longer than we need. You must join us at dinner; there will only be Craven and myself (and you don't call *him* a stranger, eh! petite méchante?), and after that you can go to bed if you like."

"But it is so soon," faltered Rachel.

"Tu ne m'aime pas," said Mrs. Arundel, with a shake of her head, intended to be reproachful.

"Oh, Elise!" remonstrated Rachel; "and now, when I have fewer friends than ever." And she commenced to give way again to her grief.

"Well, then, you will do as I ask you, carissima, for *my* sake, will you not? and you will feel much better after the little effort. Come, that is a settled thing."

And so poor Rachel was tormented into

joining the family dinner on that first sad day of loneliness, and to listen—with dry eyes, indeed, for she was too proud to break down before servants, but with a brain on fire—to the ordinary regimental topics (often suddenly dropped when their details became at all connected with the events of the last two days) which formed the conversation, and in which Cecil Craven took a very meagre share. For he felt for Rachel, and could not bear to see her at the dinner-table, suffering as he knew that she was. As he met her afterwards in the drawing-room, he said to her,—

"Why do you come out of your room, when I can see it is so painful to you?"

"Elise persuaded me to it," replied Rachel; "she thought it would do me good."

"Stuff and nonsense!" he replied; "go to bed now if you wish it."

"Will you make my excuses?" she asked, for their hostess was out of the room at the moment.

"Of course I will. Good-night."

She echoed the word, and left the room,

thankful to be released. And when Mrs. Arundel pursued her a few minutes afterwards, with the evident intention of bringing her back to the drawing-room by main force, she found her friend stretched in a dead faint across the bed, and for the first time suspected that she had gone too far in forcing Rachel Norreys, strong as was her spirit, into keeping up the unnatural strain which her nerves had experienced during the past week.

She had broken down under the attempt. She had an immense stock of mental courage, but very little bodily strength with which to back it. Under excitement she could do anything, but the necessity for action withdrawn, and Rachel was feeble as a child.

Now, as she lay unconscious upon her bed, her slender limbs looking so unwomanly in their apparent lifelessness—her eye, through which the energetic spirit was used to shine and blazon, closed and inanimate—it would have been difficult to guess that in that delicate form there beat

a heart large enough to encompass the love of the world, and courageous enough to fill the breast, and that without decreasing from his merit, of the bravest man that ever stepped this earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISGIVINGS.

It is not to be supposed that, even in her distress for her father's death, Rachel could entirely lose sight of the fact, that Raymond Norreys might arrive in England any day, and claim her as his wife. Indeed, when the shock of the first-named grief was a little subdued, the second appeared to gather in intensity, and the two to change places. That which had just passed seemed in the retrospect as if it had been looked forward to for ages, and it was but in the natural course of events that it should happen ; whilst this, coming on her with stealthy tread, took an unexpected and sudden form, and the nearer it drew, the

less she felt prepared to meet it. She was not without a latent idea, that should Raymond arrive in England first, he would pursue her to Gibraltar; and her one great wish and prayer now was, that the relief transport might make its appearance previously, and that she might be permitted to travel home in company with her friends. But the days gradually crept onwards, and yet no transport was signalled to be in sight.

Rachel did not rise from her bed on the day following her fainting fit. She wished to do so, but Dr. Harris would not hear of it, and she felt too prostrate to resist his will. But on the third day she was up, and busy packing her clothes for the voyage, with many a sigh over the numerous mementos of his affection with which her poor father had laden her. But, otherwise, herself again, and as shy as ever of letting the outer world guess at her inner feelings.

One circumstance occurred that day which very much disturbed her. She shook off the feeling at first, and called

it "nonsense," but she found it returning again and again, until she was fain to confess to herself that she was thoroughly annoyed and puzzled by it.

As she was leaving her room for the dinner table, she encountered in the drawing-room, which was empty, Caroline Wilson. At first, simply surprised that she should have followed her there, but supposing that she had some favour to ask or communication to make, Rachel demanded her business, and not in the most cordial tone.

"None with you, ma'am; I am waiting now upon Mrs. Arundel."

"Have you come as her maid?" said Rachel, with surprise.

"Yes, ma'am," responded Mrs. Wilson. "I have been engaged to enter Mrs. Arundel's service as soon as I left yours, for some time past."

Her former mistress made no reply at first, but passed on and left her, then returning a few paces, she said, haughtily:

"Well, I don't require your services in *my* room, Caroline, and I beg you do not

attend me there. You must know well enough that the memories connected with yourself are not pleasant ones to me."

Mrs. Wilson dropped the most respectful of curtsies.

"Certainly, ma'am; I will acquaint Mrs. Arundel with your wishes, and she will doubtless order me to attend to them." And with a second inclination she left the room.

Rachel was the first recruit for the dinner service, and she had time for thought before the others joined her. She could not understand what she had just learnt. Did Elise believe her, or did she not? For months she had been the depository for all Rachel's grievances with regard to this servant; for her tales of Mrs. Wilson's cunning artifice and smooth hypocrisy; of her dishonourable actions, her quiet insolence, and her vindictive tongue; and Elise had sympathised with Rachel for being obliged to retain such a woman about her, and appeared disgusted with her character and goings on. And yet she had engaged her to be her own servant, and that without any reference to

Rachel, and some time before her father's death; probably at the very moment she was listening to, and joining in abuse of her, from and with the friend in whom she professed to have entire confidence. Rachel did not think so badly of Elise as to suppose this was an intentional or premeditated affront on her part; she cared for her too much. But the fact remained, and it wounded her in her present state of mind to think that she should not have been treated with perfect openness, and that one of the few friends she had left was not exactly what she had imagined her to be.

She felt sore and tender on the subject, and had no rest until the dinner was over, and she could ease her own honest heart by giving her friend an opportunity of clearing herself from the imputation of double dealing, which the circumstances at present wrongly (as Rachel believed) threw upon her.

But Mrs. Arundel was only prepared to laugh it off as a matter not worth mentioning.

"You are not serious, surely, amica mia, in asking an explanation for such a very simple thing. I wanted a servant—I have had to put up with a half-caste, as you know, ever since I have been here—and you are about to dismiss yours. What more natural than that I should offer to take her off your hands, voila tout?"

"But you did not offer to take her off my hands, Elise, or I should have reminded you what a bad servant she is."

"Pardon, chèrie, she can dress hair, can she not? and alter a dress if necessary; and surely you would not be the one to speak against her good qualities as a nurse."

"As to the first two accomplishments," replied Rachel, "I can say nothing. I disliked her too much from the first day we had her, ever to allow her to touch me; she obeys her orders of course, or no one would keep her; but she does more than she is told. She is intensely officious, and very prying and curious, and——"

"I think I have heard all that before, carissima, or something like it. Caroline

herself has not a few tales against a certain little lady's temper, and——"

"And you can listen to a servant's recital of my faults, true or not, Elise? I did not think so meanly of you. There is not a gentlewoman in the land who would dare to say a second word to me against yourself."

"I never said I permitted it, petite."

"No, but you can take her into your service after it, and keep her about your own person. What can the woman think but that you agree with her, and side against me?"

Elise Arundel lifted her white shoulders in contempt.

"What does it signify what a servant thinks or does not think?" she said.

"Nothing to me," rejoined Rachel, "as I have often shown her; but I thought you cared for me too much, Elise, to have a person about you who you know I hate, and who, you strongly suspect, hates me."

"Oh, fal lal, nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, in a do-away-with-the-matter style. "I am sure Mrs. Wilson knows her duty

a great deal too well to hate you, or any lady who has employed her. And as for yourself, darling, it's only a prejudice on your part against the poor woman, a little jealousy, I am afraid, because the poor dear pater thought a good deal about her. Now, confess, is it not so?"

But Rachel was silent.

"Come, my dear girl," continued her bosom friend, in a coaxing voice, as she came nearer to Rachel and commenced caressing her. "Look at the matter in a reasonable light. I couldn't have gone on board ship very well without a servant, and all those children upstairs to look after, and it was convenient for me, to say the least of it, to get Caroline Wilson. Come, chèrie, make it up with your own Elise, or you will make her look as miserable as yourself." And she coaxed and wheedled the pale lips into giving her a half smile and a kiss, and then the matter was supposed to be amicably settled between them.

"Only promise me, Elise, that that creature is not allowed to come about my bed-

room, or I shall have to vacate your house, and go to Mrs. Marsh or Mrs. Williams."

For the offers of harbourage to the orphaned girl had been many and pressing, and she had as little reason as most in a foreign settlement to complain of want of hospitality or kindness. But her own particular friend was vehement in her assurances that nothing and nobody should be allowed to vex or disturb her dear Rachel as long as she chose to remain with them; and entreated her again and again to think no more of the unlucky circumstance than she herself had done in bringing it about. And Rachel promised, meaning what she said, and tried hard in consequence, to believe that her dear Elise was perfectly sincere, and that it had been an unfortunate necessity, and nothing more, that had compelled her to engage Caroline Wilson as her personal attendant. For two days after that, she never saw the woman, even about the house, and caught herself wondering more than once where she was hidden, or what had become of her. But yet, her name alone was so odious to

Rachel, that she never mentioned the subject, or her surprise at it, although she could not forget that Caroline Wilson was near her. She never entered her room, where the different articles about to be put into her trunks, lay in many a confused medley, without running her eye quickly over the various groups to see if they had been moved, or in any way meddled with. She never woke in the night and heard the slightest noise, the breeze, may be, getting up from the sea, and rattling the laths of the venetians against one another, or the cry of some large bat or night-bird attracted by the light which she burned, without sitting up in bed and holding her breath, and listening to hear the rustle of a dress or the creaking of a shoe.

She often reproached herself for these suspicions; called herself weak, unjust, and unnecessarily wary; but still they returned, and still, as every night drew on, she felt that she was not safe from scrutiny, and perhaps theft.

Once, as she roused herself suddenly from sleep, with her father's name upon her lips,

she was confident that she had heard a sound, as of some article dropped upon the floor, and, at the same time, saw the glimmer of something white which passed by her side and was gone. She could only have fancied or dreamt it, however, for, springing out of bed, she found her room empty and her lamp extinguished, and (when she had lighted it again) everything in its place as usual. No—stay—here was a workbox overturned, but that may have been done before she went to rest, for she had retired early that night, and very weary. As she stooped to replace the fallen box, she heard the handle of the door on the opposite side of the house turned once or twice, and apparently ineffectually. She sprung to her own door at once, and saw (oh! how Rachel hated herself for the misgiving which had prompted her to believe it Caroline Wilson), only her dear Elise trying to regain her bedroom, the portals of which, were not in such satisfactory order as could have been desired. When she saw Rachel's figure, white-robed like her own, she gave a little start,

and then re-advanced to the table. In one hand she held a lighted taper, and in the other a pocket-handkerchief.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "I hope I have not frightened you. I have been suffering agonies all night with the tooth-ache, and not liking to disturb dear Jack, came out to try and find the laudanum for myself, and the wind has blown my stupid door to, and I cannot open it."

"Have you got the laudanum?" demanded Rachel, thinking that of the greatest consequence.

"Well, no, I cannot find it."

"I thought you kept all your medicines in the chest in your bedroom."

But poor Mrs. Arundel's toothache came on so violently at this juncture, that she could only put her handkerchief to her face and groan; and the sound of talking having disturbed her husband, his footsteps were heard approaching the scene of conference, and Rachel had nothing to do but to beat a hasty retreat to her bedroom again.

When there, although Mrs. Arundel's

toothache, and the refractory door, were sufficient to account for the noise she heard, and the sea-breeze coming in at the window may have blown out her light, she still could not dismiss from her mind the foolish idea that the shadow she had seen flit past her bedside was not all due to her imagination, and that, although she would not hint such a thing to her friend for worlds, Caroline Wilson had, in some mysterious manner, visited her room that night.

But her doubts on the subject received a far stronger confirmation a few days later, and in which they were assisted by the words of Mrs. Arundel herself. It was the day week of her father's death, and Elise had persuaded Rachel to take a short drive with Major Arundel in the pony-phaeton, excusing herself from accompanying them on the score of a bad headache and unusual lassitude. Rachel was glad to go. The company of poor old Jack was very congenial to her feelings, and, this being the first time she had left the house, the evening air unusually inviting. Major Arundel avoided the general

thoroughfares, and drove her gently along some of the by-roads that led away from the town and its insignificant bustle into the quiet country, and there they talked of him who was gone, in a manner that, until then, Rachel had been unable to speak to any one in. They stayed out late in consequence, and they came home by a back path, anxious still to escape observation if possible, by which means they arrived at the stables before the house, and having left Major Arundel there with the pony-phaeton, Rachel walked quietly up the garden path alone, and her light step was through the sitting-rooms and in her own apartment, before any of the inmates of the house heard her enter. It was now dusk, and, to her surprise, there was a light burning there, and a figure seated before the table, which rose up with a hasty cry as she turned the handle of the door, and discovered the startled face of Eliza Arundel. Her hand was full of papers—old letters, memoranda, and bills, and before her was Rachel's desk, wide open, and with half its contents turned out upon the table. She

stood where she had risen, deadly pale, staring at Rachel as if she was an apparition, and seemed for the moment to have lost the use of her tongue.

Rachel looked at her rifled desk, at the overturned papers and scattered notes, and her thoughts flew at once to Caroline Wilson.

"Good heavens, Elise! then that woman, Wilson, has been at my papers after all."

As she heard the suggestion, a look of intense relief passed over the features of Eliza Arundel, and from pallor, her cheeks assumed a bright scarlet flush, as she quickly replied,

"Yes, my dear Rachel. What can you think of finding me thus amongst your belongings? but I had hoped to replace them before you arrived. My dear child, I am afraid it is true; some one has certainly been at your desk. As I passed by the verandah window, I heard a noise as of footsteps in your room, and knowing your dislike to anything being touched, I looked in, and only saw your desk left open, with

all its contents lying about. I came round directly, but whoever it was had escaped, so I was about to re-arrange them. I have been trying to think who it could have been who had the impertinence to do it."

"Who it could have been," repeated Rachel, contemptuously, "who should it have been, but your delightful waiting-woman, Caroline Wilson? I told you what she was. She will open your desk in the same manner the first time it suits her convenience to do so. Don't take the trouble to re-arrange them, Elise; I can do that, and I will lock the desk up in one of my trunks to-night. She shall not get another look at it any way; so I hope she made the most of this one. How foolish of me to have left my keys about."

"Yes, it is very imprudent, dearest child," returned Mrs. Arundel, who had quite recovered now from the fright Rachel's sudden entrance had occasioned her; "you mustn't do it again; but you are such a thoughtless little creature. Shall you dress for dinner to-night, darling?"

The "darling" thought she would not

dress for dinner that evening if her dear Elise would excuse her, and then her friend left her alone. Rachel was more indignant than vexed about her desk having been opened; for there happened to be nothing of consequence in it, except a few old letters of her father's, and they were all safe. It was only what she had suspected all along of Caroline Wilson, and she should have been more on her guard against her. But she was really surprised, for she had imagined that the woman was not living in the house at the present moment. Whilst they were at dinner that evening, Cecil Craven walked in.

"Have you heard the news?" he inquired.

No: no one had heard any news.

"The relief transport is telegraphed."

"Is it, really?"

"Really and truly—mail-steamer, also. Now, ladies, you'll have enough to do."

This news was received by the members of the party with very different feelings. Major Arundel's thoughts flew immediately to the men under his command.

"It will be hot work to get them all on board, Craven. I must go up to the colonel's after dinner and hear his orders."

Mrs. Arundel's mind was entirely occupied with the idea of how many trunks there were still to pack, and whether they were likely to get all the clothes home from the wash in time; whilst Rachel could only remember, with a warmer sensation of pleasure than she had experienced for the last few weeks, that the regiment must really embark in the course of a couple of days, and that there was now no doubt but that she should perform the voyage home, as she had so much wished to do, in the company of her regimental friends. She forgot Caroline Wilson and her dishonoured desk —she forgot even the parting which lay at the end of that voyage, and the probabilities of no other than her husband meeting her at Southampton or Gravesend; she only remembered, with a return of the old enthusiastic excitement and careless forgetfulness of everything unpleasant in the delight of the moment, that what she had so long desired had nearly come to pass,

and that there could be no doubt of its fulfilment.

"Shall I tell Wilson to send up his wife to you to-night, my dear?" inquired Major Arundel, as he stood ready accoutred for his after-dinner visit to the colonel; "she will be useful to you in packing. We shall have to start by sunrise on Thursday next, if I am not much mistaken."

"Yes—do—if her own boxes are ready," answered Mrs. Arundel, growing very red as she said so.

But Rachel could have no suspicions in a quarter where she loved. These signs and signals rushed back upon her memory in after-hours and bathed the past in a flood of daylight; but at the moment they bore no significance for her. She looked at her friend as the major took his departure, and said quietly, "Has Caroline been staying at her own house, Elise?"

"Yes," was the rather hesitating reply; "the fact is, I sent her home chiefly on your account" (which was a romance, for Mrs. Wilson had asked for and obtained leave to prepare for the expected voyage; but it is

just as well to credit ourselves with all the good we can in this world).

"Thank you, dear," said Rachel, as she stepped to Mrs. Arundel's side and kissed her. She felt quite grateful for this proof of Elise's solicitude that the feelings of her friend should be respected, even at the expense of her own convenience.

"But then," continued Rachel, "how could it have been her who opened my desk this afternoon?"

Mrs. Arundel's large blue eyes dilated wide with innocent amazement.

"How, indeed! Could it have been Mary, Rachel?" naming the children's nurse, a half-caste Portuguese girl.

"Scarcely," answered Rachel, "considering that she cannot read; and, putting that aside, could have no possible interest in my letters. Mrs. Wilson may have walked up from the barracks on purpose. She is quite capable of doing so. But pray let us change the subject, Elise; I dislike even talking of that woman. When is the transport likely to be in, Captain Craven?" she asked of that gentleman, who, not having accom-

panied Major Arundel to the colonel's, had been enjoying a cigar in the verandah.

"Perhaps to-night; perhaps to-morrow morning," he replied. "She was signalled at six o'clock. If she makes sufficient way, she will anchor to-night; if not, she will put in the first thing to-morrow. The mail-steamer is in. Did you not hear the guns?"

"I am afraid none of the 3rd will have much interest to spare for the mail-steamer this time," said Mrs. Arundel; "we shall be able to answer our letters in person. I must leave you, Rachel, to do the honours of coffee to Captain Craven to-night, for if there is one order to give, there are fifty. Send me a cup into my room, dear, and don't expect to see me again this evening."

"I shall come and help you by-and-by," was the reply, as Mrs. Arundel left them to themselves.

"I am so sorry I never found your gold stud, Cecil," said Rachel, drawing her chair close to his, as soon as they were alone, and speaking low; "but I searched for it every-

where without success. It is the most extraordinary thing where it can have rolled away to."

"Never mind," said Cecil Craven, with that true politeness which tries to set every one at their ease. "I dare say I dropped it somewhere out of doors. I am a very careless fellow. Don't think anything more about it, Rachel;" and he laid his hand on hers as he spoke.

"I beg your pardon; is this Major Arundel's house?" said a voice from the verandah.

They turned their heads simultaneously in that direction, and saw the figure of a man standing on the threshold, wrapped in a rough coat, and with a naval cap over his eyes, which, when he distinguished the figure of a lady in the lighted room, he immediately doffed.

"This is Major Arundel's, but he is not at home," replied Captain Craven. "Do you want anything with him?"

"I have just arrived by the mail steamer," said the stranger, advancing into the room with a slight bow; "I came here to see

Mrs. Norreys, who, I understand, is on a visit to Mrs. Arundel. If this is the case, will you kindly let her know that her husband, Raymond Norreys, is waiting to see her ?"

CHAPTER IX.

ONE FLESH.

She had been sitting with her back towards the verandah and the stranger's face, but as she heard his last words, Rachel rose tremblingly and confronted him. She had just assumed the mourning for her father, and as she stood before him, her slight figure looking slighter from her black apparel, her face, pale from the intelligence she had so suddenly heard, her waving chesnut hair all gathered behind her head in one large knot, Raymond Norreys could scarcely associate her appearance with the remembrance of the girl he had parted from, who had possessed the brightest of

eyes and cheeks, and curling hair falling in tangled masses all about her shoulders.

But he had heard the news of Dr. Browne's death immediately upon his landing, and he knew this pale girl in mourning must be the wife he had thought of meeting so ardently and so long.

"Is this my wife?" he exclaimed, advancing towards her. "Rachel, dearest, don't you know me?"

She did not speak, or move one step to greet him, No! she had no recollection of this bright intelligent face which was looking so earnestly into hers—of those dark eyes beaming so affectionately upon her. She could only stare at him, struck with amazement, and feel that her husband was a stranger.

Cecil Craven had merely said, "This is Mrs. Norreys, sir. I will inform Mrs. Arundel of your arrival," before he had made his escape. He felt a scene was coming, and entertained, with most of his sex, a righteous horror for anything of the kind. He bore down upon Mrs. Arundel with the astounding news that Mrs. Nor-

reys' husband had arrived, surprising that lady in a most unbecoming dressing-gown, which she had quickly to exchange again before she could appear to welcome the new comer.

"Go into the drawing-room as soon as you can," urged Captain Craven, "or there'll be a row. Norreys looks a regular fire-eater, and Rachel is staring at him and saying nothing. Make haste, there's a good creature, and save her from it!"

"Save her from what?" demanded Mrs. Arundel in a sharp tone; for this solicitude for Rachel on Cecil Craven's part was anything but gratifying to her feelings. "You seem to forget, Craven, that the man is her husband. Rachel has made her bed, and she must lie on it. However, I will really go as soon as I have put on my dress again."

"Do," he rejoined; "for I dare not go back. I am off to the colonel's. Good-night!"

And in the meanwhile they — the husband and wife under discussion—had stood for some minutes and looked at one another.

Raymond saw her tremor and distress, and attributed them at first chiefly to the adverse circumstances under which their reunion was taking place; but when she still remained silent, he repeated his question:—

"Don't you remember me, darling?—your own husband, whom you married in Littleham Church? Ah! Rachel, what a long, long time ago that seems!"

He drew nearer, and put his arms around her as he spoke, and she felt that she *must* say something, or tell him all by her silence. And so the faltering words dropped from her tongue:—

"Oh, I am so unhappy!"

"My dear one," he exclaimed, "I heard it all at the hotel just now. I am so sorry, dear Rachel! I wish to heaven I could have been with you a week or two ago, that I might have comforted you through that sad time. My bird! it was hard you should be left alone to suffer; but, for my part, it could not have been otherwise. I only arrived in England a fortnight ago, and this was the first steamer that has left for the Rock since."

Still running on, thankful to have in his arms what he had so longed and hoped for, Raymond forgot to notice that no syllables of welcome or rejoicing fell from her tongue, and that she only shuddered in his embrace and was silent.

"How cold you are, dear," he said, kissing her as he spoke; "and why—how is this? You are trembling. Have you been very unhappy without me all these weary years, Rachel?—have you longed for me as I have longed for you? Well, never mind, they are over at last. You are not much altered, now I come to look at you, dear girl! You are pale and thin, but, please God, the change to England will set you up again, and I shall have my rose, a damask rose before the winter sets in."

But here he was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Arundel. As her gracious "Mr. Norreys, I believe," was heard, Rachel turned with a cry from her husband's embrace, and rushed into the arms of her friend.

"Eh, bien chèrie, qu'avez-vous?" demanded that lady, as she patted Rachel's

bent head, with an air of reproach, and acknowledged Raymond Norreys' bow with another inclination of her own. "We are very pleased to see you, Mr. Norreys, though we scarcely expected you so soon. I think you have taken my little friend here rather too much by surprise. Now, Rachel darling, show Mr. Norreys what a woman you can be, and go and pour out the coffee for me."

She had flown to the shelter of her friend's bosom, believing it to be a shelter. She did not like being spoken to as if she were a child, and driven thence as though she had no business there. She passed her hand proudly over her moistened eyes, and reared her stately young head and crossed the room to where the coffee equipage was laid out, her husband's eyes following her moving figure admiringly as she did so.

And then he commenced to thank Mrs. Arundel for her care of, and kindness to, his wife during his absence. Even in the midst of her hurry and distress Rachel could not help pausing to admire the ease with which he chose his language, and the

thorough-bred air which hung about him as he gracefully made this acknowledgment, impressing both his hearers as he did so, with the conviction that he considered himself the only one from whom such acknowledgment was due. Mrs. Arundel seemed wonderfully taken by his address. Her answers were most gracious. She was only too glad to have been of any use to dear Rachel, and she hoped that Mr. Norreys would consider himself their guest also until such time as the regiment left Gibraltar, which, perhaps he had heard, would be almost immediately.

Mr. Norreys was perfectly aware of it. "In fact," he continued, "we came alongside of the transport-steamer almost all the way, and only passed her this afternoon. She will anchor to-morrow morning."

"Then I shall consider you my guest until we start," said Mrs. Arundel, with her sweetest smile.

"You are very kind," returned Raymond Norreys, "but I could not think of putting you to such inconvenience, and have already engaged rooms at the hotel. I dare say we

shall be in England almost as soon as yourselves, for the mail-steamer is expected from Malta, I hear, in a few days."

Smash! Down came the coffee-cup from Rachel's unsteady hand, as the words left her husband's lips, and the next moment she sat down in the chair next to her, and began to cry bitterly.

"Oh! I must go in the transport," she said, vehemently; "I must go in the transport. I *cannot* go in the steamer. Oh, Elise! keep me with you."

They had both started from their seats as the noise of the falling china roused them, and were at her side together.

"Rachel, dearest, what is the matter?" exclaimed Raymond Norreys, his face all alight with love and anxiety to learn the reason of her sudden distress.

"Mr. Norreys, would you oblige me by calling the servant? he is probably only at the back of the house," said Mrs. Arundel hastily; and then as Raymond rather unwillingly obeyed her behest, she added in a lower and angry tone to Rachel—"Rachel! what are you making such a fool of yourself

for? Do you want to let the whole station know that you have a penchant for Cecil Craven? I gave you credit for greater sense. I feel quite ashamed of you. Come, rouse yourself."

The remedy was harsh, but effectual, and no second dose of it was needed. Rachel started at her friend's insinuation. The words "for shame" burst from her own indignant lips; and then she rose, shook off the touch of Mrs. Arundel's hand, and dried her eyes. When her husband returned, she was looking herself again, and he thought no more of the little outburst.

After all, it was but natural she should wish to go with her old friends—very natural and very proper; but he would soon make her forget the loss of them. But *she* seemed never to have realized until now what the coming back of this unknown husband would prove to her; it had certainly never struck her mind until that moment, when the coffee-cup fell, that all her hopes of returning to England with the dear old 3rd were like it—smashed. Of course she could not go with them now.

She would have possessed no right to a passage before, though, left alone as she was, they would have accorded her one through courtesy. But now, with a husband to look after and provide for her, there would be no such excuse. The disappointment was bitter; but still more so was the thought that Elise, and at such a time, could use unkind words towards her. She might feel for her; she, who knew all. And she had said something, also, that Rachel found still more difficult to forget or forgive. She had coupled her name with Cecil Craven's in a manner which forbade her keeping silence on the subject any more. And as the young wife sat a little apart by herself, musing gloomily on these things, Mrs. Arundel was trying to make her defection pass unobserved by Raymond Norreys, or she appeared to be doing so. She attempted excuses for Rachel to Rachel's husband which galled the young man's spirit, and made him like his wife's bosom friend less than he had done at first. She hinted at her having several friends in the regiment to whom she was very much attached, and,

consequently, it distressed her to leave them, even for such a happy occasion as the present. What friends? Mr. Norreys had imagined that Mrs. Arundel was herself his wife's most intimate lady friend.

Oh! lady friend! Yes, certainly, so she was; but there were others—. Now, Mr. Norreys mustn't look so shocked, for it was nothing out of the common way; they, ladies in foreign stations, did very dreadful things sometimes, there was no doubt, and went the length of making friends of gentlemen occasionally, but then, just consider the lack of female society in such places; that must be their excuse.

Had Mrs. Arundel, then, any such *very* intimate gentlemen friends herself? Now, who said *very*? Ah! she saw Mr. Norreys was a very dangerous man to tell secrets to, and she must be careful what she said. But would she answer his question? Well, then, no! perhaps she had not; but consider the difference in their positions. She had a husband to look after her, and children to engage her attention. (Here Mrs. Arundel's face assumed the pensive and tender ma-

ternal expression which it always wore when speaking of her children to strangers.)

Ah! Mr. Norreys little knew how a mother's time was taken up. Dear Rachel might know some day, and she would find she had very little to spare for anything else then. Now, Mr. Norreys must not go and make more out of what she had said than was really meant, or fancy her "chére petite" was light or frivolous. She was very fond of Rachel, devotedly so; that was, perhaps, why she scolded her oftener than she had need to do. Oh, she was a dear creature! A sweet girl! Such a general favourite! Quite the pet of the regiment! They should miss her terribly in the 3rd when she was gone. And such a spirit! Might Mrs. Arundel suggest to Mr. Norreys to be very gentle and lenient with her at first? Her poor father had indulged her very much, there was no doubt. If he had not——well, well, it was of no use talking now about what *might* have been, was it? and Mr. Norreys must think no more of anything she had said than he would of any other woman's chatter They were pri-

vileged nuisances, were they not? with a depreciatory smile, which was intended as a challenge for her hearer to commence a fierec denial of the charge. But, privileged or not, Raymond felt Mrs. Arundel to be so thorough a nuisance at that particular moment that he had not the conscience to deny her affirmation. He had been very restless under the last half of her harangue. He had fidgeted on his chair, and turned his eyes a dozen times to where Rachel sat upon the sofa with drooping head, and wrapt in earnest thought. He did not admire being recommended by this fat, fair lady whom he had only known an hour, to be gentle and tender to his young wife. He, who had flown to Gibraltar, burning with love for her; only anxious to be allowed to make her life's happiness by his own devotion. He, who was now only restlessly awaiting the moment when he should get her by herself, and see all the shy timidity she now displayed, charmingly provoking as it was, melt away beneath her wish to make him fully understand how much she loved him. So he replied rather curtly to

Mrs. Arundel's hints and entreaties, and ended by summarily producing his watch, and remarking aloud that it was past ten, and he thought it was time that they should go. He had a hired carriage waiting for them at the gate, and perhaps Mrs. Arundel would kindly permit what luggage his wife could not take with her, to remain until the evening, when he would send for it.

Mrs. Arundel was agreeable to everything, and Rachel, who had been roused from her reverie by the colloquy, stood up, and prepared to seek her room, closely followed by her friend. But as they found themselves alone, Mrs. Arundel was startled by Rachel turning round with sudden warmth, and asking her the direct question—

"Elise, what did you mean, by saying I have a *penchant* for Cecil Craven?"

"Just what I said, darling," laughed Mrs. Arundel, merrily, "you have a *penchant* for dear Craven, have you not? you *like* him?"

"Yes; but from the manner you said it, one would have thought——"

"What, chérie?"

Rachel was silent.

"Come, dear girl," added Mrs. Arundel, coaxingly, "you are fighting with shadows to-night! I spoke harshly, I am aware, because I didn't know what you might be going to say next, and every one might not view your little fancies in the same light that I do; but I did it with the best intentions, Rachel, otherwise you might have made a scene, and Mr. Norreys angry. Whatever you may think of your husband, my dear, never let him know it—that's the only safe rule in married life. Those things in the bag will be quite enough for to-night, Rachel, and I will send on the boxes to-morrow. Addio carissima! and don't be a goose."

And this was all the parting comfort her bosom friend had to give her: this was the sum total of the advice—the hope and the assurance that Rachel received in this the hour of, perhaps, her sorest need. As soon as she had re-entered the drawing-room, her husband took the bag from her, and shaking hands with Mrs. Arundel, drew Rachel's arm within his own, and

led her down to the carriage which was waiting for them.

"I don't much like your friend, Rachel," he commenced to say, as they began their journey to the hotel, but the rattling of the wheels, and the jolting down the steep hill was so great, that it made conversation almost impossible. So Raymond tried another means of communication, and essayed to take her hand within his own, but Rachel drew it away nervously, and shrunk into the further corner of the vehicle, so he said and did no more until they had arrived at their destination.

But then, when they found themselves in a well-lighted and comfortable private room, and screened from all observation; he, first removing with the tenderest care her hat and cloak, took both her hands in his own, and bringing her before him in such a position that he could not fail to see her face, he said—

"Now, my little girl, we are alone at last; and you will no longer be too shy to tell me that you love me, and are glad to see me back again."

But she turned her head rather to one side, and looked away from him, without a word.

"Rachel," said the young husband again, and rather hurriedly, "tell me that you love me, dearest, or only look it, if you will not speak. I have come a long way to procure the happiness of hearing those words a few days earlier."

But still there was no answer. A lie rose once to her trembling lips, but was choked back again, by the force of habitual truth in her heart, and she was silent. Then he grew alarmed, and half angry.

"For Heaven's sake, speak!" he said, releasing her hands from his, and pacing the room hastily; "say something, if only to tell me I have deceived myself; Rachel do you love me, or do you not?"

"How can you expect it?" she said in a low tone.

"My God!" exclaimed Raymond Norreys -- and, for a moment, said no more. But then, he added passionately, "How can I expect it? I expect it by the love in my own heart, which has been faithful to your

image through five long years. I expect it by the oath you swore at the altar to keep to me—and me only."

"I *have* kept to you," she replied, slowly.

"Yes; in the letter, I conclude so: if you *had not*—" he exclaimed, and a dark expression passed over his face as he said the words, that showed there was blood within him that could be dangerous if need be; "but it is idle to speak of such a contingency: I had hoped for more than that from you, Rachel! I have longed for this hour—I have prayed for it. I have even wept for it, and I hold my much-desired future in my grasp this day, only to hear you ask how I can *expect* that you should love me!"

"Raymond!" said Rachel, gaining courage to speak from the exhibition of his despair; "Raymond, you married me, a child, not knowing what I liked or did not like. You left me for five years to grow a woman, with tastes maturing every day, and fancies changing. You left me to forget even your features. Before Heaven!" she said, as passionately as himself, "if you

had not spoken your name this night, I should have received you as a stranger. How can you expect to have a woman's love from a woman you have never won?"

He groaned audibly as she said the words.

"I was a fool to expect it," he replied; "a fool to cherish a man's love for you. Is it possible you have quite forgotten what you once felt for me?"

"Forgotten it," she exclaimed, her old excitement lighting up her face, and making her appear twice as charming in her husband's eyes as she had done yet; "I tell you, I had forgotten even your features. You stand before me now as a newly-made acquaintance. Judge, if I can welcome you as a husband should be welcomed! Forgotten!" she repeated bitterly; "I have often wished that I could have forgotten that I lived. I have dreaded your return for months past. I have hoped and prayed against what you say you have prayed for. I wonder why I tell you this! I had no intention of telling it until you pressed me. It has come—and I know there is no

escape for me—I have left those I *do* love, and accompanied you here to be your wife. I shall try to do my duty to you, Raymond, but do not demand more from me. You cannot force me to love you: don't make me do the other thing. You asked me for the truth, and you have it. I do not love you—I do not believe I ever shall."

But the last words were added in a lower key, and almost inaudibly.

"Rather a bitter truth!" he replied, with a dash of sarcasm in his calmness which was very sad to listen to; "rather a bitter truth! but I thank you for it, Rachel, all the same. Perhaps it is better I should know the worst at once than that my wife should play the hypocrite to me. But you mistake if you imagine that I am a man to take the letter from you without the spirit of your duty. It is true that I could claim you for my wife if I chose to do it: that I came here so to claim you; but the casket would be worth little to me, Rachel, without the jewel of your love. I married you when you were far too young (God forgive me for the unintentional wrong I

did you!), and I see now the mistake I made, and that if I had waited to woo you now, you would, probably, with your maturer taste, have never been won by me. But the mistake was made, and it is irremediable. You have lived too long under the protection of my name for us to separate without bringing a great scandal upon it and you, which I am naturally anxious to avoid. (Besides which, what would you do, poor child! alone as you now are in the world, without a protector of some sort?) Therefore, let me still protect you, Rachel, with the name of husband; let me still have the gratification of feeling that I am near you to contribute to your comfort, I hope, and certainly to your convenience, and I will ask for nothing more——"

She started, blushed crimson, and looked towards him, doubtingly.

"Do not fear to misapprehend my meaning," he said, gently; "we are, at least so far one in interests, that I may speak plainly to you. When your poor father (he is fortunate not to have lived to see this day)——"

"Oh, I thank God that he didn't!" interrupted the girl, midst heavy tears.

"When your father sanctioned our marriage, Rachel, it was on this condition—that I went to sea for another cruise, and did not claim my wife until I returned from it; it might have been only three years—it has proved to be five. Weary years they have been to me, and would have been still wearier, doubtless, could I have guessed what waited to greet me at their close; but we will not speak of that again. You did not wish to wound me, I am sure; and truth, however hard, is dearer to me, at any time, than a specious lie. But your father would never have permitted our imprudent marriage to remain disannulled had he imagined that when I returned to claim my wife she would have learned to hate me."

Here her hands went up, as if in feeble remonstrance or denial of the charge, but he took no notice of them.

"Therefore I will not claim you as my wife until you love me as he thought you would. I will *never* claim you, Rachel,

until you come of your own free will, and put those dear hands in mine, and tell me with your eyes, which I feel are honest, and could not look a lie, that I am the one man in all the world who you would choose to be your husband. And I will wait patiently, and believe, until death robs me of the hope, that that day may be shining for me, in the future, even now! If I could do more for you, poor girl!" he added, sorrowfully, "I would, but that is, I am afraid, impossible—only believe that I am willing to do as much as I can; and look upon me, Rachel, as a friend—as a brother, if you will; and do not be afraid lest I shall mistake your friendship (if you can give it me) for love, and take advantage of it. And be assured that in all things I shall only seek your comfort as their end, and especially in this—that what has passed between us this night be kept a secret for ourselves alone. It will be best so; will it not?"

"Much best," she answered through her sobs.

"And one thing more, Rachel," he said,

as he drew nearer to her: "try to be happy, my dear, as far as in you lies; and do not let me think that I have been the means of destroying all that makes life bearable for us both."

And as she raised her eyes to try to thank him for his generous forbearance, they encountered his, and his were full of tears.

CHAPTER X.

INTRODUCES US TO CRAVEN COURT.

THE dinner-hour at Craven Court was seven o'clock, but it was now a quarter past that time, and the second bell had not yet sounded. Mrs. Craven rang that of the drawing-room rather impatiently, and asked the reason of the delay.

"Mr. Northland is not in yet, ma'am."

"Oh," ejaculated the mistress of the house, as if the circumstance were nothing out of the common way, and the excuse perfectly valid. But Lady Frances Morgan, a young and frequent visitor of Mrs. Craven's, arched her eyebrows in surprise at the nonchalance which her hostess displayed, and re-betook herself to her book

with an expression on her face very like disdain, to think that ladies should be quietly kept waiting for their dinner because a middle-aged man was forgetful enough to let the usual hour pass unobserved. But Lady Frances was sufficiently intimate with the manners and customs of Craven Court to know that Mr. Northland was a privileged person there, and that until he made his appearance no dinner would be served; and so all she had to do was to pray for his speedy return. In the meanwhile she read her book, and thought it (the foregoing circumstance, not the volume) "very tiresome."

Other people had thought about it before her, and voted it not only tiresome but strange; for Mrs. Craven was not a woman to defer to most of the fancies of her guests—in fact, if any one else but "Cousin Gus" (as she invariably styled Mr. Northland) presumed to disturb the regularity of her meals, she was wont to be very much disturbed herself: not that Cousin Gus could be exactly styled a guest, as he had resided at Craven Court for the

last five-and-twenty years — indeed, ever since the owner of it had given up the ghost. Some of Mrs. Craven's kind friends had hinted that it was not at all proper that Mr. Northland should take up his quarters under the same roof as the young widow; had raked up long-forgotten stories of an old engagement between them, or if not an engagement, at least a love-making which bid fair to end in one, until Mr. Craven came with his thousands and tens of thousands, and separated them.

Some had shaken their heads (it would seem as if the operation mentioned was a pleasurable one, considering the promptitude with which the world is ever ready to exercise it), and said it was a pity Mrs. Craven did not marry her handsome cousin, for both young and handsome he was when first he became an inmate of her house; others wondered she did not, but these last were strangers only, for every one who knew anything about the matter had heard the conditions of the late Mr. Craven's will, and had no wonder to bestow upon it, for the late Mr. Craven, who held

a rental of something over ten thousand a year, and who must have possessed an inkling during his lifetime that his wife had not married him for love alone, had made a provision in his last testament against her enjoying herself after his death, whatever she had done before, by a clause wherein, in the event of her re-marriage, every halfpenny of the liberal settlement he had made upon her, as well as the property of Craven Court, should pass into the hands of his son's guardians, and be kept in trust for him until he should come of age. If she remained a widow, she was amply provided for, for life, whilst Cecil's income amounted also to several thousands a year; if she married again, she was left penniless, not even the possessions she called private being admitted to be legally hers. The opinions upon this voice from the grave were various. Old men with gay young wives, and commonplace men with pretty wives, compressed their lips and nodded their heads, and said it was a good will, an excellent will, and Craven was a man of sense; men secure of the hearts of their bosom-partners,

who knew that a mention of the probability of their own death would bring the ready tears into the bright eyes, and make the rosy lips they loved tremble, said the late Mr. Craven was a selfish brute, and it would have served him right if his wife had bolted from him. Old maids couldn't see what there was to find fault with, for Mrs. Craven would be very well off if she remained single, and what on earth a woman could want with a second husband was beyond them; and wives who had lived to bitterly regret the day they became so, said the young widow ought to think herself a very lucky woman, and that if she were wise she would be in no hurry to quarrel with the conditions of her husband's will. But what the person most interested in the arrangement, Mrs. Craven herself, thought of it, no one ever knew, for she never discussed the point in public. Evidently she had considered it politic, if not pleasant, to comply with its dictates, for she was Mrs. Craven still, mistress of Craven Court, and likely to remain so. When his father died, Cecil had been an infant of three or four years old, and it

was not for a twelvemonth after that event that Mr. Northland had paid his first visit to his widowed cousin, a visit which was often repeated, and lengthened each time, until it only seemed natural that he should take up his abode permanently in the bedroom which had come to be considered his own. Not that he did so with any parade or public notification that he was about to settle down for life ; on the contrary, to the day he first appears in these pages, he had always spoken of himself as a visitor at the Court, and as if his residence there was only a temporary one. Cecil Craven was his mother's darling and delight; apparently she cared for the welfare of no other creatures in the world but this son and "Cousin Gus." For them she gave up her own will and pleasure; occupied her fingers and her mind, and—waited dinner with equanimity. With others she was naturally rather sharp and dictatorial in manner, although she was too well-bred often to permit her friends to see when she was annoyed. In appearance, although now fifty years of age, she was universally acknowledged to be still

charming. In her girlish days she had been a beauty, and, unlike most beauties, had retained her good looks as the years advanced, having preserved to perfection her figure, which was tall and slight, and the clear white skin with which she used to charm her admirers thirty years before, so that these attractions, added to dark eyes and hair and regular features, made Mrs. Craven appear ten or fifteen summers less than her real age.

In disposition she was light-hearted and fond of society; a woman to talk to, and also to engage a listener; in a few words, a woman of the world. But for all her gaiety there were moments when those who knew Mrs. Craven best, said that she had not always a mind entirely at ease; there were times when a dark shadow would suddenly flit across her face, although it might as soon depart; a shadow which told of more than a passing annoyance, which bore the burden of a bitter memory, or the recalling of a lost and regretted joy.

Cecil Craven returned all his mother's love, and apparently with interest, for his

was an affectionate and *out-going* heart, though it possessed none of the deeper feelings of hers. The news of the arrival of the transport from Gibraltar, with the 3rd Royal Bays on board, had reached Craven Court that morning, and raised a half hope that Cecil himself might make one of the party at dinner; but his mother knew that until his regiment was fairly settled in quarters at Aldershot the senior captain would scarcely be spared from the scene of action, and that therefore she must wait patiently till he could get leave. But it was tantalizing to think he was so near, and yet not with her, for the Court was not far from Weybridge, and it was more than a year since her son had paid his last visit to England. But as Mrs. Craven was musing on these things, and contemplating her own fashionably-attired figure in the glass, another quarter of an hour slipped away, and Lady Frances Morgan became impatient. She gave something very much like a yawn as she closed her book, and addressing Mrs. Craven, said—

"Do you think Mr. Northland intends coming in to-night at all?"

Which hint was so strong that her hostess could only ring the bell again, and tell the butler he had better send out one of the servants to see if Mr. Northland was in the grounds, or anywhere near the Court.

"Mr. Northland has just come in, ma'am," replied that dignitary, "and the second bell is about to ring."

And indeed at that very moment the loud clanging sound was heard, which let all Weybridge know that the residents of the Court were about to discuss one of their numerous meals.

"Come along then, Frances," exclaimed Mrs. Craven, gaily. "We will not wait for Gus any longer. Take my arm, and I will be your cavalier for this evening."

And arm-in-arm the ladies descended together to the dining-room, where the style of everything denoted that the want of money was a thing unknown. Mrs. Craven took the head of the table, and the chair at the foot was reserved for Cousin Gus, who

was never displaced from his ordinary seat and office of carver at the family board, even by the rightful lord of the domain, Cecil himself. Before the soup had been carried away, Mr. Northland made his appearance, full of apologies for his late arrival, although, to judge from the look of self-satisfaction on his features, he did not take his own defection very much to heart. Handsome features they still were, though the wreck of what they had been. Of almost the same age as his cousin, Mrs. Craven, he appeared much older, from the fact of his hair and beard being plentifully sprinkled with grey. With soft brown eyes, a small aquiline nose, and a sweet, womanish, undecided mouth, Gustavus Northland, with the weight of half a century upon his brow, looked no wiser and no more fit to take care of himself than he had done at five-and-twenty, or fifteen. He was exceedingly quiet, almost shy in his manners, utterly unable to sustain a conversation, which always dropped still-born from his hands; but very sweet tempered and obliging, caring for no particular hobby ex-

cept smoking, which he pursued to an inordidate degree, being seldom seen, except at meals, without his meerschaum in his hands. Gentlemanly and polished in his address, he was yet never happy in society; but lounged about all day in an elaborate dressing-gown and smoking cap, in which guise he would haunt the garden, looking more like a Turk than an Englishman; and even when he was attired in ordinary clothes there was an air of dressing-gown hanging about them, which the man carried into everything he said or did. Those who had penetrated the depths of Mrs. Craven's clear bright mind and quick understanding wondered what she found so reciprocal to her feelings in the intercourse she maintained with this supine, inactive intellect, and these opposite tastes, for she was bright, lively, and energetic in the extreme. But the widow did not associate with her cousin, and no one who had followed and observed them through a single day would have said that she did so.

She watched over him and his interests much in the same manner as she had

watched over and cared for little Cecil when he was left, some five-and-twenty years before, fatherless. Greater minds than hers have taken pleasure in the same solicitudes before now, and for the benefit, in the eyes of the world, of creatures as responsible. If there was a deeper feeling mixed with her care for Gus Northland—a memory connected with the long-past years which time had no power to uproot—no living soul had any right to whisper it, for Mrs. Craven had never confessed to its existence by word or look; and the days for making the subject one of scandal were at last happily ended.

As Mr. Northland began to make his excuses to Lady Frances Morgan, on the present occasion, Mrs. Craven cut him short, though not unkindly, but as though she feared that he might play his part tamely, and with ill-effect.

"Never mind, Gus; Frances will forgive an old gentleman for once, for forgetting the dinner-hour. What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon?"

"By Jove! my dear, I can't say; an

afternoon is such a length of time to get rid of; I have been strolling by the lake, and sitting on the grass, smoking. Deuced pretty it is down there, too. I wanted you to talk to me, Margaret, and then I should have been quite comfortable, by Jove."

"Why didn't you send for me, or come for me?" she said, looking affectionately at him across the table. "I would have been glad to sit with you, Gus, if I had known you wished it."

"But we had business to do in Weybridge, Mr. Northland—shopping—and we did it," interposed Lady Frances, with rather an air of defiance at that gentleman, as if she would say, "the convenience of other people in this house is to be studied occasionally, sir, as well as your own."

Cousin Gus laughed under his breath, in a tone of feeble commiseration for the lower intellect. "By Jove! that is the only thing you ladies ever think about, I do believe," he said, tittering; "give you an hour's shopping, and you imagine that you have done a good day's work, now don't you?"

For Mr. Northland, in common with most empty-headed men, professed to consider women soulless animals, created for the pleasure of the nobler sex alone, and fit for nothing else but dressing, looking pretty, and making love. He professed, but only so, for in reality he was the most dependent man that ever breathed, upon the aid of women; as to his cousin, he could scarcely eat his breakfast, or retire to his couch without an appeal to her superior judgment as to the nature and quantity of the aliment he should consume, or the hour he should disappear. He hung upon her words as if she were an oracle, and was lost and incapable without her constant advice and direction, but he never acknowledged her to be his guide and counsellor, even to himself; men who need a woman's superintendence never do.

Lady Frances, who was a belle in her own county, and used to a great deal of homage, resented Mr. Northland's last remark, and the conversation thenceforward ran in a very ordinary channel until the dessert was placed upon the table, and

the little party found themselves alone. Then Mrs. Craven said—

"I almost hope we may see Cecil to-night, Gus: if he can get leave before the last train starts, he will certainly be here."

"I am quite anxious to see this famous Cecil," exclaimed Lady Frances Morgan, "though I feel quite nervous of undergoing his lordly scrutiny, since you say he is so fastidious in his tastes."

"I do not think you need have any fear, my dear, of what he will think of you," remarked Mrs. Craven, significantly.

"No, by Jove, you needn't," said Gus, with a glance of admiration at her blooming contour; for notwithstanding his low appreciation of their mental powers, Mr. Northland was a universal admirer when the sex was fair.

And, indeed, Lady Frances had no reason to put down the assurances of her friends as empty flattery, for she was a very pretty blonde of about twenty years of age, with a pink and white complexion, bronze-coloured hair and eyes, and a plump, trim figure. And Mrs. Craven was exceedingly anxious

that her young guest should look her best in Cecil's eyes, whenever he might arrive, and viewed her present becoming attire of blue silk with great complacency, for Cecil's mother had a future for him hatching in her brain, a great to-be, in which Lady Frances Morgan's aristocratic birth was to be pitted against his thousands, and the latter were to win the day.

"But he must have seen so many different styles of beauty during his travels," sighed the girl, who was romantically disposed, and not disinclined already to fall in love with Cecil Craven before she had seen him, from the glowing description his mother had given her of his various qualifications; "and our English type must appear very insipid beside the remembrance of the charms of Spanish ladies."

"I do not think Cecil has met with many Spanish beauties at Gibraltar," replied Mrs. Craven, "at least not of the best style; but whenever I have heard him compare the ladies he has met abroad with those of his own land, his argument has always been in favour of his countrywomen. I am sure

you will like Cecil, Frances, he is so perfectly free from the mannerisms of most young men of the modern age, at the same time that he has learnt all that is to be learnt from mixing in the world and good society; and with it, he is such a home bird; I do not believe, with all his love of gaiety, Cecil is ever really happier than when he is sitting here in the evenings quietly with us. Oh! he is such a fine fellow, and such a dear, good son!" And Mrs. Craven's eyes felt unaccountably moist as she spoke of her absent one, and recalled his perfections to her visitor.

"Dear Mrs. Craven," said Lady Frances, who had observed the slight emotion, "how very fond you must be of him! I only wish my mother cared half as much for me. I have often thought what a pity it is that you have not a daughter to be always at home with you. A daughter would have been such a comfort to you, and nearly as loveable as a son,—would she not?"

Pretty Lady Frances had stretched out her plump white hand as she spoke, and laid it, with a gesture half caressant, half sympa-

thizing, upon that of her friend, turning her eyes upon her as she did so, and put her playful question.

What was it that made Mrs. Craven, usually so eager to respond to any expression of affection on the part of her young guest, snatch away her prisoned hand, and raise it, with its fellow, to try and hide the rapid changes in her face?

What was it that made her presently burst forth in a hurried, agitated voice, as if she could keep silence no longer, and must speak or die?

"A comfort? I should think she would have been, a joy! a blessing! an angel from heaven! Oh! I wish I had had one, —I wish I had had a daughter to love, and cherish, and protect,—I wish I could have had one to keep by me always! God knows, I should have been a better, happier woman than I am, if He had given me a daughter *for myself*."

She spoke so rapidly, and with so many tears, that Lady Frances could barely catch the import of her words. But the girl was frightened at her mood, so unusual and so

strange, and did not know what to do or say. Was this the gay, *insouciante* mistress of the Court, who was always as eager to forward any amusement, or even to join in it, as a girl might have been,—certainly as equable in her temperament, as unvarying in her good spirits, and as cheerful in general society as any woman of half her age. But as Lady Frances was about timidly to approach her friend, and try to say something commonplace, as if a violent fit of weeping was nothing unusual in the middle of dinner, she was surprised to see Cousin Gus, after looking at Mrs. Craven for a few seconds from the opposite side of the table, suddenly rise and seek her side. When there, he put one of his hands nervously upon the drooping head and the other round her figure.

"Come, dear Margaret," he said, "you are forgetting yourself. You are not alone, —you have your guests with you. Rouse yourself, my dear,—remember where you are. Come, Meg, be calm—for my sake."

He seemed to hesitate at first whether he should put in the last clause; but when he

had decided, he said it firmly. Lady Frances was quite taken by surprise. He no longer looked like the indolent, fine gentleman, who appeared indifferent to everything but his pipe and his dinner. On the contrary, his voice was more than persuasive: it had in it almost an air of command, notwithstanding that his words were so gentle; and the manner in which, when he had concluded his speech, he put his hands beneath his cousin's arms, and forcibly raised her into an upright position, was as much as to say, "I have *asked* you to be calm, but I expect you to comply."

Stranger still, Mrs. Craven did not seem to resent the action, nor to think it out of the common way. She did as Cousin Gus desired her: she sat upright, dried her eyes, and was smiling again, almost before he had accomplished the proceeding.

"Thank you, Gus," she said, as she did so. "You know the queer moods I have sometimes, and how to treat them. Thank you, my dear. The heat has been great today, and I dare say I have overtired myself. Come, dear Frances, if you have

finished your dessert, we will take our departure for the drawing-room. It is nine o'clock, I see; but I do not quite despair yet of having my boy here to-night, and I must give some orders about the preparation of his room."

And the ladies left the dining-room, as they had entered it, together. But when they had mounted half of the broad staircase which led to the upper apartments, and found themselves upon the landing, Mrs. Craven drew Lady Frances into a small conservatory which adjoined it, and said, nervously—

"I hope I didn't frighten you, my dear child, just now; but I am a little excited, I think, in the prospect of Cecil's arrival. I have not seen him, you know, for more than a year."

"Oh, no!" said Lady Frances, feeling she must say something; "and I am sure it is very natural, dear Mrs. Craven; but I never would have said what I did if I thought you would have minded it. And you will have a daughter some day, I dare say," added the girl, blushing, "when Captain Craven takes a wife to himself."

"Yes," replied the mother, but mechanically, and as if her thoughts were far away, and then said, hurriedly, "the fact is, Frances, I had a little daughter once, and lost her, and the subject is painful to me; so don't mention it again, please."

"Had you really!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes opening wide with a feigned surprise. "I thought you had never had any other child but Captain Craven."

Then Mrs. Craven's countenance fell, as if she already regretted that she had made the avowal.

"I had; but it is long ago, and forgotten by all but me. Never mention it to any one, Frances: promise me that you will not. I could not bear to have the subject revived. I am sorry that I told you."

Lady Frances thought the matter could not be one of very great consequence, but still she gave the promise, not once, but a dozen times over, in deference to the mother's wounded feelings; then they went into the drawing-room together.

The evening wore away, and still no Cecil made his appearance; and poor Mrs.

Craven had looked so sad since dinner-time, and so weary as night advanced, that it was almost a relief when the clock announced that the last train must have come in without bringing the expected arrival, and that, therefore, the household might retire to rest as soon as was convenient to it.

Lady Frances was young, and not used to find any difficulty in falling asleep, and so it startled her greatly, when she had been slumbering for about half an hour, to find herself suddenly roused by a light in her eyes, and a voice in her ear, and waking to see Mrs. Craven, in her robe-de-chambre, bending over her bed. At first she imagined something must be the matter, and started up in alarm; but her hostess soon quieted her.

"Don't be frightened, Frances. If I had known you were already asleep, I would not have come in. I only want to warn you again about repeating what I told you to-night upon the landing. You are too young to understand how much trouble and annoyance I might have to encounter if the memories of those old times (very painful ones

to me, my dear, you must be aware) were raked up again by my officious friends. Don't mention it anywhere, Frances—not to your mother, nor Cecil, nor even to myself. Try to forget I ever said such a thing. I cannot think now how I came to trouble a child like yourself with the story of my old griefs. You won't forget, Frances?"

And Lady Frances, who had been very tired and very sleepy when Mrs. Craven first disturbed her, gave the required promise over and over again; and when she was left once more to darkness and repose, found that sleep had been chased from her eyes before the strange wonder that had arisen in her breast, as she pondered on the midnight visit which had been paid her, and tried to puzzle out the reason why it should have been thought necessary to pay it.

CHAPTER XI.

MAJOR CRAVEN ARRIVES AT THE COURT.

The next morning the sun was shining gloriously over the Court and its surroundings, and every one was in good spirits once more, and anxiously looking out for the arrival of Cecil Craven from Aldershot. Mrs. Craven had a double reason for longing to see her son again. It was not only that her maternal affection was eager to be gratified with the sight of his face, but she was anxious to be assured that he looked happy and like himself; for of late Cecil's letters had not been written in the same light-hearted, confidential strain that he usually affected. Some of them appeared to have been penned under depres-

sion of spirits, although he never hinted at any reason for his being low; and although he had continued to detail all the news of Gibraltar and his regiment, Mrs. Craven felt, whilst perusing them, that something was kept back, and something, also, that was a cause of trouble to himself.

She had fancied, too (but this might have been the exaggeration of a mother's fears), that his letters during the last few months had been colder than heretofore; less full of inquiries after home and herself; more barren of terms of affection and anticipations of a happy meeting. But if this were true, there appeared little trace of such a feeling in his countenance or manner when Cecil Craven walked into the Court breakfast-room at about eleven o'clock that morning, and returned his mother's embrace of welcome and fond salutation.

If there had been a cause for more constraint in his correspondence with her—a reason for him to feel colder and less affectionate towards her, it melted away before the sunshine of her smile and the warmth

of her tears; for, in one sense, Cecil Craven loved his mother more than Raymond Norreys did his, although the latter man had a heart which could burn like fire, and Cecil was almost unimpassioned in his disposition, although where he chose he could be very *fond*. But the secret of the difference lay in the fact that Mrs. Craven had a mind superior to that of her son, and to which his, when brought in contact with it, bowed; and the mother of Raymond Norreys looked up to him for advice, as a woman should look to a man, and was dependent upon him, and he knew it. If Raymond's own mind told him that such and such a course was the right one to pursue, no earthly power, no opposing intellect, could turn him from it; but Cecil's was a facile temperament, and easily led wrong, even though he desired to do what was right and best.

He had come to Craven Court that morning, not feeling in his heart quite so cordial towards his mother as he had ever felt before, and he had determined that he would show her that it was so, and come

to an explanation with her in consequence; but when he saw her handsome, kindly face beaming upon him, and felt the motherly hands caressing his head and figure, his resolutions all faded away, and he returned her greeting as warmly as it was given. His character, compared with that of Raymond Norreys, was doubtless the most amiable of the two—some people might think, the most loveable; but if he possessed the art to attract the affection of others, he had no power to fix it, unless he were aided by adventitious circumstances; whilst Raymond was a man for a woman to love once, to love for himself alone, and to love for ever.

"You will be terribly disappointed, mother," said Cecil, as having shaken hands with Cousin Gus, and received an introduction to Lady Frances Morgan, he turned again to Mrs. Craven; "you will be terribly disappointed, I am afraid, to hear that I must be back at Aldershot to-night. But," he went on to say, not permitting himself to be interrupted by the pantomimic expressions of annoyance and

surprise displayed in the countenances of his listeners, "when you know the reason you will dry your tears. I have got my majority, mother, and without purchase, though I wish I could have purchased it a dozen times over, and saved his life instead. We lost poor Arundel coming over."

"What! the Major Arundel you were so intimate with, Cecil?" exclaimed his mother.

"The same, I am sorry to say," he replied; "he was lost overboard in the Bay. The most extraordinary thing you ever heard of; no one knew a word about it till it was all over. It was a lovely night, with a strong breeze on, and we had all been sitting smoking together on the hen-coops by the side of the vessel, you know—steamer going then at ten knots an hour. I had walked over to the other side of the poop to speak to a friend, when there was a cry of 'Man overboard!' A boat was lowered immediately, but the captain said from the first there was no chance of saving him, whoever he might be, in such a running sea. Well, after a little, we

slackened our speed to let the boat come up with us, which she did, as she went, no trace of the man having been seen, so then the ship's company was called over; they were all right, so then I called over our fellows, and sure enough, poor old Arundel was missing, and has never been seen or heard of, from that time to this. Of course, I had to assume the command at once, and I shall have very little holiday-making until the head-quarters make their appearance. Poor old Jack! his death was deuced ill-luck. Every one in the corps feels it so!"

And there was something so like a tear in Cecil's own honest blue eyes as he finished his recital that his listeners all looked very grave, and any way but in his face, for fear of increasing his emotion.

"And so I stepped into my majority," he went on, after a pause, "and of course I'm glad to get it, though I wish any one else had given it me. I shall be in orders in the next 'Gazette.'"

"Has Major Arundel left any family?" inquired Mrs. Craven.

"Yes; a wife and three children—a very fine woman, too. She will be badly off, I expect, for I don't think she will have anything but her pension to keep herself on."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Craven, compassionately. "Is she young, Cecil?"

"Something over thirty, I believe—by-the-bye, a bosom friend of Rachel Norreys, mother. You haven't asked any questions about your favourite, Dr. Browne, yet. Were you not very sorry to hear of his death?" And Cecil right-about faced, and confronted his mother as he spoke.

"Very sorry," she answered, earnestly, "for we were close friends once, although much separated of late years. Still more sorry for his young daughter left without him. Is she with the regiment at Aldershot, Cecil?" and as Mrs. Craven put the question, she busied herself looking for some work, wherewith to occupy her fingers whilst listening to her son's news.

"She is not," he replied; "her husband, Norreys, arrived at Gibraltar just before we started, and they are coming on in the next steamer."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Craven. "I am glad her husband is with her, poor child, she will be happier."

"Yes," said Cecil, "she has few enough to care for her, God knows! *fatherless* and *motherless*—poor Rachel!"

He laid such emphasis upon the adjectives that his mother, raising her eyes from her occupation, regarded him fixedly for a few seconds, and then quietly dropped them on her work again.

"What is Raymond Norreys like?" asked Cousin Gus. "I knew his father many years ago. We were young men together, and had many an escapade in company. Fine fellow he was, too, by Jove! What is his son like?"

"A fine fellow, also, from the little I saw of him," replied Cecil. "A small man rather, but with a bright, clever face, and very winning manners; a man, I should think, to make his wife happy."

"I thought so—I thought so," returned Cousin Gus, rubbing his hands together. "Just what his father was, by Jove. He's the fellow to make her happy. I knew it;

I knew it long ago;" and Cousin Gus appeared quite excited as he walked up and down the room, rubbing his hands, and saying, at intervals, that he "knew it all along." The mention of the son of the companion of his early days, had waked up old memories from their store, and carried him back to those times, until he felt almost young again.

But it must not be supposed that Cecil Craven had all this time been neglectful of the charms of Lady Frances Morgan. The young lady was no stranger to him by name, for his mother, in pursuance of that great plan whereby these two were to be made one, had filled her letters to Gibraltar with glowing descriptions of the amiable qualities and personal charms with which her young friend was endowed. And, for a wonder, Cecil Craven, with such descriptions fresh in his mind, still did not feel disappointed when he saw the original; for there was something very taking about the exterior aspect of Lady Frances Morgan, particularly to a man who had seen a good deal of life—

so called—and the meretricious beauty which haunts the world. There was an air of repose about her fair placid features; an appearance of innocence and freshness about her, which would be very pleasant to see always at one's own hearthstone, and to feel one had ever to turn to when the outer life and the outer pleasures had wearied and sickened the heart. There are women in this world who are content to be so considered; who see nothing galling in being "turned to" when excitements more engrossing fail, and pursuits more solid weary; and long may the race be kept up, for there will always be men who are the better for such resting-places. There is another genus of the same sex, who show their power by preventing the sickness and weariness from ever making its appearance; but all are not so gifted, and the next best thing to prevention is certainly cure; and Lady Frances belonged to the former class. She had no idea of argument, and few powers of persuasion, even for the right, but she had a short, sweet memory for wrongs re-

ceived, an easy judgment for offences committed, and full ripe lips ever ready to seal the forgiveness she was so quick to bestow. And to read all this at a glance in her fair facile face, and even in the tranquil disjointed play of her dimpled white hand, was as easy as to test the truth of the assertion.

Lady Frances, on her part, was just as favourably impressed with her first view of Major Craven, for, as it has been before stated, she had already thought a great deal more of him, and the chances of his falling in love with herself, than was at all necessary; and her foolish little heart was quite ready to succumb directly the sultan lifted his hand to throw the handkerchief at her.

She was one of a large stock-in-trade which had belonged to the late Earl of Riversdale; and her mother, the Countess, having been left with very inadequate means to keep up her exalted station and educate her family of daughters (of which Lady Frances was the eldest), it was pretty generally known that no reasonable offer would be refused for the hand of that

young lady. Indeed, so many county squires risen from nothing, and younger sons without sufficient to support themselves, had already put in their claims, that the Countess of Riversdale was quite thankful to get her daughter out of the way, under the safe chaperonage of Mrs. Craven, not being without an eye herself to the coming home of the handsome and only son with the liberal income. And for that reason Lady Frances Morgan, who had seen very little society in her own county since her father's death, and to whom the gaieties of Craven Court almost ranked as dissipation, was permitted to visit at her friend's as often as she pleased, and Mrs. Craven and the Countess of Riversdale corresponded together about their "dear Frances" and their "dear Cecil," and understood each other's plans perfectly well, and were equally anxious for the success of their issue.

Of course Cecil was made a great deal of for that day, and as he promised to return as soon as he could get leave, and make a long stay at the Court, a great

many plans were laid for enjoying the summer weather by means of pic-nics, fêtes champêtres, and boating excursions.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Craven, during one of these discussions—rather timidly her son thought—"perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Norreys may be of our party then. I shall ask them to stay here, Cecil, as soon as they return to England."

"Shall you?" he replied, but almost curtly. "I don't think they'll come."

"Why not?" inquired Mrs. Craven, with surprise.

"Rachel is not like other girls," said Cecil, evasively; "and she is unhappy just now about her—about Dr. Browne, and, I fancy, will try and shut herself up."

"Oh, I hope not!" put in Lady Frances. "I am so anxious to know Rachel Norreys. I am sure I should like her so much, because Mrs. Craven has told me so many things about her when she was in England." (For, as I have before mentioned, Rachel, when a girl at school, had, in consequence of Dr. Browne's intimacy with the Cravens, paid several visits to Craven

Court, and had been made much of whilst there.)

"Have you spoken of her?" said Cecil, looking across Lady Frances to his mother. "I am glad to hear that. I am glad to think Rachel is not quite forgotten by you: I confess I have thought she was."

"Why, Cecil?" demanded Mrs. Craven, eagerly. "Why should you have thought so? Have I ever said as much? I continued my correspondence with Dr. Browne up to the time of his death, and received my last letter from him only a few days before I heard the news."

"Did you?" said her son, drily. "I had imagined otherwise, that is all."

She appeared about to press the point, but something in Cecil's face stayed the words upon her tongue, and some remark from the unconscious lips of Lady Frances diverted her attention. Not only hers, but his, for the girl was quite ready to be flirted with, and her cavalier was quite ready to flirt with her. They were in the garden at the moment of this discussion, and in the exchange of compliments and

badinage, the young people seemed to be such excellent company for one another, that the mother slipped away unseen, and left them together.

So pleasantly indeed did their conversation wile away the summer afternoon for Lady Frances and Cecil Craven, that the first dinner-bell had sounded before they thought of returning to the house. As they entered it, Mrs. Craven met them, looking weary, and as if she had been waiting to see them again.

"I thought you were *never* coming," she said, almost fretfully, as they gained the hall.

Where was her anxiety gone, that these two should fall in love with one another, and make a match of it? Her face looked careworn and harassed, and dark lines had already appeared beneath her eyes. Perhaps, if questioned, however, she might have answered, that her eagerness did not extend to the very first day her son had been restored to her. Lady Frances blushed and looked timidly at Cecil, and murmured something about having had no idea it was

so late; and he stood up for her as a lover, however incipient, should do, and said, firstly, that it was his fault that they had been so long, as he had refused to let his companion know the time when she demanded it; secondly, that he had never looked to see how it went himself; and, thirdly, that he didn't consider that it was late. For all of which, he received bright, grateful glances from Lady Frances' bronze-coloured eyes, as she tripped past his mother and himself, and made her escape to her dressing-room.

But the weariness in Mrs. Craven's eyes did not disappear with their excuses, and as she followed her son to his apartment it was still there.

"Are you not well, mother?" he inquired, kindly, as she commenced to busy herself about his room, to see that all he required had been provided for him.

"Only a headache, dear; my eyes look heavy, I suppose, don't they? I often have them so in the hot weather." And then, coming closer to him, and looking him earnestly in the face, she added, "What

made you think I had ceased to take an interest in Rachel Norreys, Cecil ?"

The question was so sudden, and the revival of the subject so unexpected, that Cecil was quite taken aback. He stuttered, and stammered, and reddened, before he had framed an answer to it, and then broke out with the not unusual one, "I don't know, I'm sure, mother; only because I did."

"Listen to me, Cecil," she went on to say, impressively; "don't think such a thing again, or say it, my dear, if you please, either to her or others, because it hurts me to hear it. I shall always take an interest in, and feel an affection for, Rachel Norreys, for her father's sake, if not her own."

At this juncture Cecil turned and kissed his mother.

"God bless you, mother, for saying so," he whispered; "for I love the girl!"

"Cecil!" she almost screamed.

"Hush!" he said, smiling; "not in that way: as a sister, mother—nothing more."

"Oh! thank heaven!" she murmured;

and laying her head upon his shoulder, wept.

"Come, come," he said, soothingly; "don't give way. You have been excited to-day, and it is too much for you. If you knew Rachel as I have done, you would feel how capable she is of attracting one's affection; and she is not happy, mother; her husband is a good-enough fellow, doubtless, and she will come to love him in time, perhaps; but she was married far too young, and she knows it."

"God pity her!" exclaimed his mother, some recollection, perhaps, of her own married life weighing heavily upon her mind. "God help her, poor child!"

"If I thought," her son went on to say, "that in your multifarious cares and engagements you had forgotten Rachel Norreys, forgive me. I ought to have known you better, poor mother!" And he laid his hand almost compassionately upon the dark hair which still lay upon his shoulder.

"Dr. Browne was one of my earliest friends, Cecil," she said, presently; "one (I need not mind telling you now that he

is gone) of my most faithful lovers. I had several offers at that time"—and here the natural vanity of the ci-devant beauty made her droop her eyes; "but I do not think I ever had one made in so sincere a spirit as poor Alfred Browne's, nor the vow of constancy which followed it, kept with so much faithfulness."

"And yet he married," observed Cecil.

Her eyes drooped still lower.

"Marriage is not always accompanied by love," she whispered.

"True, true!" he answered. "I never dreamt of this, mother; it accounts for all the poor doctor's interest in me and in——"

"In whom?" said his mother.

"It is nothing—I was dreaming," replied her son.

"For his sake," resumed Mrs. Craven, as if she had never broken off the thread of her narrative, "for the sake of one who loved me so dearly, and whose friendship I so much valued, I should be sorry to be accused of want of interest in his daughter—and a child whom he loved so much, did he not, Cecil?"

"Devotedly!" was the reply.

"Poor Alfred," said Mrs. Craven, again, with tears. "How good, how kind, how unselfish he was! God rest his soul! I had intended asking the young couple to stay here, as soon as they conveniently could, after their return to England," she resumed, after a pause; "but you seem to think that Rachel would object to going into society so soon; and yet this household can scarcely be called society; we would be quiet during their stay."

"I said I thought she would object to it," he answered, "and I think so still."

"Will you do me a favour?" said his mother, hastily; "will you go and meet them at Southampton, find out their plans, and, if possible, sound her on the subject?"

"I could go and see them at Brompton," he answered, evasively.

"No, no! at Southampton, because I ask you, Cecil; and bring me word how she is and looks."

"I will, since you wish it," he replied.

Then she kissed and thanked him, and said he was her dearest, only boy, and her

great comfort. And as Cecil felt her womanly caresses and tears, all the coolness (if there had been any) in his heart melted away again, and he only felt that she loved him better than any one else on earth did.

He was obliged to return to Aldershot almost directly after the late dinner, and, although Lady Frances had emerged from that mysterious dressing-room, robed in a dress which so ravishingly became her, that her admirer felt as though he could never tear himself away; yet the requirements of the service were inexorable, and he had to take his departure again, long before their usual hour for retiring to rest; but left behind him such a bright promise of return—such visions of prospective parties of pleasure—of waltzes upon well-waxed floors to the strains of well-trained bands—of picnics to Virginia Water, and whole days in Windsor Forest—of visits to town, and the fast-fading delights of operas, theatres, and concerts—that Lady Frances had plenty of matter to dream upon until such moment as the dreams should be fulfilled, to say nothing of a certain white rosebud and

sprig of verbena which were nestling in her bosom somewhere, not apparent above the top of her low dress, and which had certainly *not* been gathered by herself.

Life was just then *couleur de rose* for pretty Lady Frances Morgan; why was it not so for every one? But the body re-acts too often upon the mind, and the hot July weather was very trying, and fully accounted for the constant headaches from which poor Mrs. Craven suffered, and the low state of spirits which their pain engendered. Indeed, so harassed did she often appear, so visible became the lines in her face, which had been only waiting for care or sickness to call them forth, that she looked, during the week or ten days which succeeded her son's first visit to his home, as if ten years had passed over her head, and written her age upon her features as they went.

CHAPTER XII.

A RETURN TO ENGLAND.

The transport, containing the relief for the 3rd Royal Bays, had anchored to time, on the morning following the arrival of the mail-steamer at Gibraltar, and the left wing of that regiment, under the command of Major Arundel, had hustled its belongings into boxes, and been hustled itself on board ship, in the space of forty-eight hours afterwards, an incredibly short time, when all that has to be said, written, and done, before some five hundred men and their possessions can be packed together and packed off, is taken into consideration. Although it is only what occurs every time that a regiment changes its quarters, it is

what the regularity, in which an army like our own is kept, alone could accomplish. Every little punctilious ceremony enjoined by military etiquette, and which to the eyes of the uninitiated appears unnecessarily strict, aids in its daily practice to keep up that habit of regular and instantaneous obedience which forms the groundwork of the admirable discipline in which the British soldier is maintained.

Rachel Norreys did not see much of her old friends during this period. All whom she most cared for belonged to the left wing, and they were too busy to call on her, and the consciousness of the unnatural contract which had taken place between her husband and herself made her feel shy of seeking them. Cecil Craven, indeed, came to see her both evenings before they started, and so did Mrs. Arundel, just to say "good-bye," but even then their mouths were full of their own anticipations and doings, and Rachel felt now as if she held no part in them.

Raymond took her on board the transport, too, the third day, to see them start, but they all laughed at the idea of her feeling

anything but merry at the brief separation, and so she had to choke back the tears which the circumstances under which they parted would have called forth, and appear as cheerful as the rest. Elise Arundel, indeed, took an opportunity of whispering that she thought her a very lucky girl, and that Mr. Norreys was one of the best-looking young fellows she had seen for a long day; and even Cecil Craven appeared quite taken with Rachel's husband, and bade him a most hearty farewell. Poor old Jack was the only one to linger behind the others, as she was preparing to return on shore with Raymond, to wring the girl's tender hand until it ached, as he bid "God bless her!" again and again, and told her how pleased he should be to see her once more at home, little thinking that the home in which they must meet would be one, on which his earthly eyes could never open.

But when Rachel had left them all, at last, and returned to the hotel with her husband, she felt more astray and less at ease than ever. There was a restraint between Raymond and herself, which all his

kindness to her could not remove, and he was essentially kind: not like a lover, not even like a brother; he had never spoken of his love—never brought one evidence of his affection or his wrong too palpably before her, nor alluded to the conversation which took place between them the first night they met since the moment it had been concluded. He would not even have kissed her, had she not, in sheer shame of shaking hands with the man whose name she bore, lifted her face to him morning and evening, and then his kiss fell lightly on her forehead or her cheek—never on her lips. During the two days that elapsed before the mail-steamer from Malta came in, he was all that the fondest and most careful brother could have been to Rachel, without any show of a brother's affection. He waited on her, anticipating her wants; he consulted her wishes in every particular, and only seemed to live to give her pleasure; at the same time that his attentions were so unobtrusive that they bore no particle of reproach in their fulfilment. He was not melancholy, nor bore any signs about him of an injured

man; on the contrary, he was very cheerful, and several times left her for an hour to herself, whilst he made acquaintance with the many strollers and sailors on the wharf, with whom he seemed a universal favourite. Indeed, his capacity for making friends appeared perfectly marvellous to Rachel, who, being of a prouder nature herself, though not more reserved, would watch him with astonishment from the hotel window, as she saw him fly from one new acquaintance to another, hail-fellow-well-met with people he had never seen four-and-twenty hours before, and causing every one he came across to catch the infection of his own mirthfulness. And once or twice, when she saw him returning to her side with a slower step (not thinking she observed him) and downcast, thoughtful eyes, she caught herself almost wishing that she had not been the means of destroying the best enjoyment of so gladsome a nature.

But if there was any chance of Rachel wanting his attendance, he was always at her side. Ready to ride on horseback with her in the mornings (they had two rides

together whilst in Gibraltar), with many a laugh at his own want of horsemanship (for what sailor, just come off a five years' cruise, ever rode well?) and expression of admiration for Rachel's firm seat and skilful handling. Ready to drive her out in the evenings, or to consent to be driven, if she liked it better; to appear interested in the revision of her old haunts, and the few beauties of Gibraltar; still ready, when they alighted, to take her down to the water side, or to sit opposite to her at a dinner, the trouble of ordering which had not even fallen upon her, and tempt her to eat by every persuasion in his power. But the evenings were the trying times; when the dinner-table was cleared, and the lamps lighted, and there were no longer any active means of making the hours pass away. Then it was that Rachel could not feel in the least surprised if Raymond, after sitting awkwardly for a short while over his solitary wine, would rise and say he was going to have a cigar, unless she wanted him to do anything for her. And she would answer timidly, "No;" and he would stroll

away down to the wharf, to the boatmen, to the billiard-rooms; what mattered it? each one of them was kinder to him than herself, and would not reappear (or she supposed so) until long after she had laid her tired head upon the pillow, and was asleep, or seemed to be.

But the weary days passed at last, and the mail-steamer came in, and during the short passage to England Rachel was so ill that she saw no one but the stewardess. Four or five times a day, indeed, was that functionary eagerly questioned by Raymond as to the state of his wife's health, and champagne and every luxury procurable was sent into the cabin for her use, but he did not venture there himself. Once, urged by the stewardess, who wondered at the lady's indifference whenever she recommended a visit from her "good gentleman" as likely to cheer her up, he did put his head into the cabin door, and say, "Rachel, is there nothing I can get, or do for you? nothing you can fancy?" but she had shrunk from his sight, answering, "No;" and he thought his presence was offensive to her,

and had not repeated the experiment. But on the day they anchored in Southampton Docks, he did run down to her with the glad intelligence that Cecil Craven had come to meet them, and was on board—glad to him, because he hoped it might please Rachel, whom he found it so difficult to please. And it did please her for the moment: she was sitting ready dressed in her cabin, and she came out on hearing it, and ran up the companion-stairs quite lightly. But disappointment awaited her at the top. Cecil Craven had come at the request of his mother, but laden with the intelligence that has already been told, of poor Jack Arundel's sudden and unhappy death, and the news shook Rachel's weakened nerves excessively. She wept violently, connecting the kindly heart that had ceased to beat in him, with her own tender father's death, and her wish that she was with dear Elise was so often repeated that no one could have helped noticing it. And yet it surprised her and Cecil Craven not a little, when the young husband, having calmed her emotion as well as he could, said quietly, but with evident

sincerity—"Rachel, if it would give you any comfort to go to your friend for a few days, I will take you to Farnborough on our way up to London, and leave you there." She almost stared, for she had had no idea that her desire, which had not amounted to a request, would have been treated as such, and complied with; but the notion, once raised in her breast, became quite irresistible, and she eagerly begged that her husband would do as he had said.

"Oh, pray do, Raymond! I feel as if I *must* go to her! Poor Elise! how unhappy she must be! Ah! I can hardly believe it yet. Poor old Jack! How dreadful it appears even to think of!"

"Are you in earnest?" demanded Cecil Craven of Raymond Norreys, as the two men stood rather apart together.

"Yes—why not?" was the reply. "Rachel is very excitable and nervous; if she doesn't see Mrs. Arundel she will probably fret herself into a fever. They seem very much attached to one another."

"Oh, yes! so they are," replied Major Craven; but he did not seem any the more

to favour the idea of Rachel going to Farnborough. The fact is, he would have much preferred to see the intimacy between these two ladies lessened by the circumstances which had occurred to separate them; but at present there seemed little chance of it, for when, after getting clear of the steamer at Southampton, they had started in the train and arrived at Farnborough, and he said, before getting out to look after the luggage, "Well, Mrs. Norreys, are you quite determined?" her hurried "Oh, yes! indeed I am!" settled the question for that time at least.

Raymond was about to follow Major Craven, and help him in the exercise of his duties, when he felt Rachel's hand timidly laid upon his, and her voice say, "Raymond, you are sure you don't mind?"

It was the first concession she had made to him since they had met; but as they had sped along, and drawn nearer to the place of stoppage, her heart had been misgiving her as to whether she were right in accepting his generous offer, and permitting him to go home to his mother's house without

her—more than misgiving, indeed, for she knew that she was wrong; but she was too anxious to have her own way, and too proud to appear to wish to continue in Raymond's company; but, at the close, her heart nearly failed her. "Are you *sure* you do not mind my not going on to Brompton to-night?"

"Quite sure!" he said, cheerfully, "as long as you are satisfied. It makes little difference to me, you know, Rachel," and he caught back a half-escaped sigh as he said so; "and I shall come and fetch you again in a few days. You will not wish to stay longer, I am sure, because my mother might think it strange; and that is to be avoided, if possible."

She almost wished that he would burst out into a storm of passion and abuse, and tell her that he hated and despised her—that he would give her, by ill-treatment of some sort, any excuse to feel that she was justified in not admiring his conduct; but this ready compliance with her wishes—and, worse still, this cheerful compliance, though she knew it was assumed—she felt

at times was more than she could bear. She only said now, though, "Thank you; you are very good. I will come back again whenever you wish it." And then he had swung himself on to the platform, and gone to assist in the extrication of the boxes she required from the general mass of luggage.

They had not much of a drive after they left the railway station, for Mrs. Arundel and her children were in lodgings close by in Farnborough; and when they had arrived at the door, Raymond Norreys kissed his wife, and drove back again to the station to continue his journey by the next train to London. He sympathized in the awful event that had made Mrs. Arundel a widow and her children orphans, but he felt he had no business within that hall-door; he would have been sadly out of place whilst the bosom friends were sobbing and embracing; and even Cecil Craven's entreaty that he would go into camp with him, and receive the hospitality of the 3rd mess, lost its weight, because he could not forget that his mother knew the day

they were due at Southampton, and would fret still more at the delay in his re-appearance than she had done at the brevity of his previous visit. The cloudless sunshine with which the July day had been ushered in had subsided into a meaningless drizzle by the time that Raymond Norreys rung the bell at the iron gate on the occasion of his second arrival at the Abbey Lodge. The flagged pavement was completely wet, and even the covered pathway looked damp as he walked up it and entered the door of his home, not with the light, firm tread with which he had trod it before, but with a step so measured that Christine never recognized it as her brother's, and started from her occupation with such a cry of pleased surprise as he entered the room, that she woke her mother from an afternoon nap, and put her into quite a fright. In the first hurry of embracing him, and expressing their delight at his return, Mrs. Norreys and Christine overlooked the absence of Rachel; but that could not be for long, and presently the expected question came—

"Why, my dear, where is your wife?"

"Not outside?" asked Christine, ready to run anywhere to welcome her new sister. But Raymond laid his hand upon her arm.

"No, dear Christine; she is not there. Rachel is not with me, mother. I left her at Farnborough."

"At Farnborough, Raymond?"

"Yes," he replied. "The regiment met with a sad loss coming over, in the death of Major Arundel, and his widow is a very intimate friend of my wife—in fact, just like her sister. Major Craven met us at Southampton this morning with the news, and it quite upset poor Rachel; and, naturally, she wished to go to her friend and comfort her, if possible. So I left her at Mrs. Arundel's, at Farnborough, as we passed the station; and I am going to fetch her again in a day or two; and that is all. And now, mother, give a fellow something to eat, for I have had nothing since breakfast this morning."

He talked fast and gaily, in order to cover the awkwardness of making such an

announcement to his relations, but they saw that his manner was assumed.

"I am very sorry to hear of Rachel's distress," said Mrs. Norreys, in her measured tones; "it is a sad coming home for the dear girl, and I dare say she felt it to be so; but I wish she had just come on to the Lodge for one night first, that we might have seen you together before she gave up her time to her friend. For, after all, the nearest friend can give little comfort in such a bereavement."

Raymond thought his mother would not have derived much gratification from seeing them together, but his sole desire in his answer appeared to be to lift the onus of Rachel's defection from off her shoulders to his own.

"It was my fault entirely that she stayed at Farnborough—my wish, in fact. Rachel has a very tender heart, and fretting would have done her no good. She will be the better for having seen Mrs. Arundel, and talked over this grief with her."

Then he changed the subject to that of the journey home, and described the dis-

comforts of a mail-steamer, but he did not once touch upon Gibraltar itself, nor the circumstances of his visit there.

"But what I want to know," said his mother, as later they sat around the dinner-table, "is, what you thought of Rachel when you first saw her, Raymond. Did you find her altered?"

"Not much grown," he answered; "but more womanly, certainly."

"But in her face, Raymond?" urged his sister.

"I thought her face altered at first," he said, "but not afterwards, when the old expression began to play about it. She has the same beautiful changeable eyes she ever had, and the delicate little nose and mouth——"

"The same *loving* eyes, I hope, Raymond," observed his mother.

"Ten times more so, you mean, mamma," said Christine, laughing. "Alick and I will have to play second fiddle when *this* pair of lovers are reunited once more."

Raymond's eyes were grave, and his mouth did not relax into a smile.

"We will yield the palm to Scotland, Chrissy," was all he said.

But his mother remarked his avoidance of the subject, and wondered at it.

"Does Rachel play or sing now?" said Christine; "for the last time she came to Brompton she would do neither, and said she hated both."

"I really don't know," stammered Raymond; 'I do not think we once started the subject of music."

"Had something better to talk about," she returned, archly.

He flushed over brow and cheek.

"Now I come to think of it, there is a guitar-case amongst the luggage," he said. "You must make Rachel herself account for its appearance, Christine, when you meet."

"How long did you say your wife was likely to stay with her friends?" demanded Mrs. Norreys. There had been a coldness in her voice whilst speaking of Rachel during the last half hour that roused in his wife's behalf the husband's jealous nature.

"She will stay as long as she has the slightest inclination for staying," he said,

determinately. "I shall run over and see her the day after to-morrow, and if she is not quite ready to come home by that time, I promised Craven to look him up at the camp, where he can give me a shake-down till Rachel can return with me."

Then Mrs. Norreys knew, slight as the circumstance was, that the actions of her daughter-in-law were not to be canvassed before her son, or there was a chance of her losing them both. So she artistically changed the theme, and spoke of Dr. Browne's death (the news of which had been sent them before in a letter, carried by some friendly hand in the 3rd Royal Bays), and of the probability of a long stay on shore for Raymond, which last was a pleasant theme enough.

"I shan't remind the old birds at the Admiralty of my existence," her son said with regard to it; "and they are hardly likely to remember me, without—though if a good chance offered itself, it would not do for a poor lieutenant to refuse to take it up, or they would be for scratching my name off the list. However, we will not specu-

late on what may never happen, mother. I have just come off a long spell of duty, and I hope now I may reasonably look forward to a year or two of pleasure to make up for it." But even as the words left his lips, he sighed to think how different a coming home he had looked forward to. But when, upon the meal being ended, and Mrs. Norreys, for some household reasons, absent, Raymond found himself alone in the drawing-room with his sister, he commenced to attack her immediately upon the coolness of his mother's tone when she spoke of his wife.

"My mother speaks as if Rachel was to blame for staying in Farnborough, when I particularly told her it was by my wish that she did so. I cannot have any of my wife's actions questioned, Christine."

"I don't think mamma intended to question them," said his sister, timidly.

"It sounded like it," he replied. "Rachel has been in great distress lately, Christine, as you know, and she is young and not used to trouble. If, on her arrival here, she would rather keep to herself (shut herself

up, as you would call it), I hope she will be permitted to do so, without comment made or surprise expressed."

"Oh, Raymond!" said Christine, hurt at the tone he had assumed, "you speak as if you had any need to caution mamma and me against being unkind to Rachel."

"No, Christine, I didn't mean that," he said; and he put his arm fondly round her as he spoke, for he saw the tears stand in her eyes; "I am sure you will both receive her kindly; but my mother is old, you see, and particular—strait-laced in her ideas, in fact, and my wife has been brought up in a different school altogether. She has been very much spoilt by her late father (and you will acknowledge when you see her how hard it must be not to spoil her), and used to have her own way in everything, and I am afraid all the rules that are observed here—the strictness about early rising, and prayers and meals, will put her out at first, and she will feel them to be irksome.

"Mamma will wish Rachel to do exactly as she pleases, I am sure," said Christine, gravely.

"It is not only that," he rejoined, petulantly; "of course she will act as she pleases, but I will not have her actions talked about. She is a wild, impetuous, beautiful little creature, Christine, but she is wayward at times. She has a will of her own, as everybody worth caring a snap about has, and I want you and my mother to remember that, and to let her be free, free from others' comments as well as from others' ways. You have influence with your mother, Christine; tell her this from yourself and in other words; make her see the sense of it before she meets Rachel, and everything will go right."

Christine sighed, but she pressed her brother's hand, and promised him obedience. At this juncture the drawing-room door was opened, and a head thrust in, the owner of whom seeing the confidential position the brother and sister had assumed, as quickly withdrew it, and closed the door again.

"Who was that?" said Raymond.

"Only Alick," answered Christine; "he generally comes in of an evening when he

is disengaged. He sees we are talking together, and does not wish to disturb us—go on, dear Raymond."

"I have not much more to say," he answered, "and will not keep you from him long—only this, Christine, that to your sisterly love and tenderness I commend my wife. If you have ever cared for me, thought of me, and prayed for me (as I know you have), extend to Rachel, for my sake, the same consideration. She is so dear to me, Christine, that I would shed the last drop of my blood to see her happy and contented; she is so much my darling, that to gain for her affection and esteem I would give up my own worldly share of it, and I look to you to give me pleasure in this respect. You are of the same sex as she is, the same age, probably with the same or very similar pursuits; and, above all, I have made you sisters. No one could be better fitted to be to Rachel what neither she or yourself have ever possessed before. Be her sister, Christine—her loving, confidential friend. Let her always have your sympathy to rely upon, your bosom to turn to, when she

requires them, either in trouble or in joy."

"She shall!" exclaimed Christine, fired with a spark from his enthusiasm; "but, Raymond, what are you to be? This is what Rachel should look for in your heart."

He started at the question, and was at first silent: then, summoning up his courage, he replied—

"I, Christine! I shall lie at her feet for a lifetime, and worship her!"

He did not say what she would be to him, or he to her; but his auditor was young, and did not notice the omission.

"You love her very much," she said, softly. "How dearly she must love you in return."

He rose hastily, but stooped again to kiss her.

"God bless you, dear Christine!" he said, "for your faith, and for your promise. Never part with either as you value my affection. Now I must not keep you any longer from Mr. Macpherson, or he will not bless the day which gave me

back my sister." And he took her hand, and raised her from the low stool upon which she had been sitting. But when they looked for Mr. Macpherson in the dining-room and study, he was not to be found.

"Mamma!" shouted Christine, from the foot of the stairs, "have you seen Alick?"

Mrs. Norreys emerged from her own bedroom. "No, my dear," was her answer; "I have seen no one. I was just coming down to seek you."

Then the servant was questioned, and he also denied having seen anything of Mr. Macpherson that evening. But, on a second examination of the dining-room, a scrap of paper was found on the mantelpiece, twisted into the form of a note, and addressed to Christine. The words in it were few:—

"I had come to pass the evening with you, but, as you seem better engaged, I have changed my mind, and am going to the Adelphi instead. Good night!

"Yours,

"A. M."

The girl stamped her foot as she read it, and then tore it up, and threw the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

"What is the matter?" asked both her mother and brother.

"Nothing of consequence," was her reply. "Alick had an engagement this evening, and could not wait long. He wrote me a few words to say as much."

She laughed lightly as she told them so, but her heart was anything but light. This constant show of temper on the part of her lover—this incessant petty jealousy—this little, mean system of reproach—where was it all to end?

Christine Norreys loved Alick Macpherson with all a woman's untiring devotion, but she had already commenced, when esteem was spoken of as an essential ingredient to lasting love, to shirk the subject even to her own heart, or to cry out that the saying was untrue.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WIDOW ARUNDEL.

When Rachel rushed up the little stairs which led to Mrs. Arundel's lodgings in Farnborough, her heart overflowing with sympathy in her friend's distress, and only anxious to pour out its wells of comfort for her need, she certainly met with quite as much reciprocity of feeling as she had anticipated. Indeed, if the grief of a widow can be exaggerated, Mrs. Arundel's, at first sight, certainly did appear to be still more violent than was necessary to the occasion; for as soon as she caught sight of Rachel advancing, her eyes brimful of tears to greet her, she threw herself upon a sofa, uttered a loud shriek, and betwixt a fit of fainting and a fit of hysteria (as if she could not quite make up her mind which

to indulge herself in, and so made a cross of the two) conjured some person or persons unknown by turns to shoot her, to bring her poison, or to strike her dead: and so startled and astonished her friend by this unusual reception, that Rachel stood in the centre of the room helplessly staring at her, until Mrs. Arundel, thinking they had both had enough of it, was sufficiently considerate to rise from her position, in which she was displaying a good deal more of her lower extremities than was necessary, and fall upon the bosom of her visitor. Then, as the latter was about timidly to suggest a few simple words of consolation, such as—

"Dear Elise, I *am* so grieved and sorry for you. We only landed at Southampton this morning; and we came here at once——"

The new-made widow interrupted her with such a torrent of regrets and sobs and self-commiserations, that poor Rachel felt quite incapable of coping with the violence of such an affliction.

"Oh, my dear child! wasn't he good?—

wasn't he kind?—wasn't he sensible?" (Each question accompanied by a sob that was half a scream.) "Did ever woman lose such a husband before? Was ever a wretch to be pitied like myself? What shall I do without him, without his guidance, his counsel—his direction?" (which, considering that poor old Jack, far from guiding, directing, or counselling any one of his household, had not even been permitted to do the same offices for himself, *did* strike Rachel, even in a moment like the present, as rather a ludicrous idea). "And left alone, too, a poor weak creature, as I am, used to the protection of another (and such another! oh, Rachel!) with those *dear*, *sweet*, *fatherless* children to look after, and think for! Oh, Rachel! think of those fatherless orphans! Ah! what a thing it is to be a widow!"

In the excitement of her grief, and the difficulty of choosing sufficiently powerful phrases by which to express her feelings, Mrs. Arundel appeared to have totally forgotten her French and Italian, and to have forsworn any but her mother tongue. But

the real cause of the omission was that her hack sentences had been culled for the necessities of polite society alone, not for occasions like the present; so, not having any on hand that would have suited the difficulty, with feminine tact she dropped them altogether.

This kind of scene went on for a long time, for the two women were alone; but when Mrs. Arundel's tears and sobs, self-reproaches and condolences, had a little subsided, and Rachel ventured to broach another topic, and to suggest that she had come with the intention of staying a couple of days or so in Farnborough, the thoughts of the widow took another turn.

"Oh, my dearest creature! how good of you; how like yourself! but I am sure I don't know where I shall put you."

This was a view of the case that had not occurred to Rachel, and she looked nearly as dumb-foundered as her friend.

"I didn't think of that," she stammered. "I quite forgot, Elise, that you would be in lodgings: I am afraid I shall inconvenience you."

"Oh! not at all, my dear," was Mrs. Arundel's response, although it sounded conventional; "the only thing is, you mustn't mind putting up with me for a night or so, and Emily" (that was Mrs. Arundel's eldest child) "must sleep on the floor; we have only two bed-rooms here, dear Rachel. Even Caroline is gone into the married quarters with her husband for the present, but she comes up in the day-time to look after the children."

It was not pleasant to share the stuffy and not over well-furnished little bed-room which Mrs. Arundel inhabited, nor to feel that in order to enjoy that privilege poor little Emily was unceremoniously turned out upon the floor; but Rachel had invited herself, and there was no help for it, at all events for a night or two. But as the day went on, she felt, in many other things, that she was sadly in the way. Mrs. Arundel, widowed, in second-rate apartments, and just come off a journey, was a very different person to Mrs. Arundel, the wife of the major of the 3rd Royal Bays, and in possession of one of the pret-

tiest houses at Gibraltar. The rooms were small and inconvenient; the dinner provided was scanty, and not of the daintiest order (a guest not having been expected); the children, three in number, and two of them boys, of an awkward, mischievous age, were constantly in the sitting-room, whilst their mother was as constantly out of it, conferring with Caroline Wilson, fighting with the lodging-house woman, or vainly endeavouring to find some article not yet unpacked, or to reduce the chaos of the sleeping apartments into something like order. So that Rachel, sitting in company with the children (a species of companionship the girl's quick, turbulent nature rendered especially obnoxious to her), or lying, when day was ended, by the side of her friend, trying in vain to extract sleep from the combined aids of a July night and a feather bed, wondered, more than once, if the obligation she had put herself under to Raymond, in accepting his permission to stay at Farnborough, had been worth the gain she had derived from it. She had come with the laudable and affectionate

desire to try and comfort her friend under the violence of so dreadful a shock as Rachel thought her bereavement must have caused her. But after that first outburst of extravagant and overdone despair, the "friend" seemed to be too much occupied with her boxes, and her dinners, and her landlady, to have any time to spare for receiving comfort. Indeed, when Rachel began to study her a little more leisurely, she appeared very much the same as she had always done before; and it seemed to her friend that it was only when Mrs. Arundel was a little cross, or a little tired, that her mind reverted to her "irreparable loss," and that she treated Rachel to another but smaller edition of her hybrid attack. Once the wife thought of writing to her husband, to tell him to fetch her; once even of following him, and giving her own reasons for the act; but each time the fear that he might misconstrue her motive into a desire to rejoin himself, rose uppermost, and prevented the accomplishment of her thought. It was on a Tuesday he had left her there; on Thursday, at latest (so she

argued), he would come to fetch her thence, and she would be ready to go. Elise, indeed, strengthened her in this resolution by her own expressed astonishment at Rachel having stayed at Farnborough before she had visited her husband's family.

"Such a charming fellow, my dear!" (Mrs. Arundel's invariable appellation for a man she admired)! "how you can part with him for a day, I can't think! Why, half the women you meet would give their eyes for such a husband. I really shall begin to quarrel with you, if you don't appreciate him better. Fancy letting the poor dear man go home by himself; I'm quite ashamed of you, petite."

"But, Elise," faltered Rachel, "to come to you, and at such a time; Raymond himself was anxious I should stop here."

"Ah, mon Dieu! yes," exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, gradually rising into the shrieking stage. "Such a time, indeed! Oh, Rachel! may you never know what such a loss is—such an *irreparable* loss."

And the widow ground the last adjective through her teeth as if she had gravel in

her mouth, and thereupon showed such strong symptoms of the hybrid coming on, that her listener hastened to change the subject. She said that she thought that Mr. Norreys intended fetching her away on Thursday, when she should be ready to return with him; and Mrs. Arundel did not press her to stay any longer. She seemed too occupied with plans of her own, but what such plans were Rachel had not been able to learn. She naturally supposed that, widowed as she now was, and having no further reason for staying in the vicinity of the 3rd Royal Bays, Elise would leave regimental quarters and settle somewhere near her own or husband's friends, wherever they might be. And she (also naturally) broached the question to her, and asked whereabouts she now thought of residing. But Elise Arundel invariably put her off. At one time she had really not decided yet —it was impossible for her to tell; at another, she had her husband's family (the only friends her fatherless children possessed) to consult before making any plans for them or herself; and therefore Rachel

of course pressed the question no further. And yet Caroline Wilson appeared to be in the confidence of her mistress, for the two were constantly whispering together, and making such remarks as, "Have that box directed, Caroline; you know where it is to go:" or, "Shall I pack the black box, ma'am; the one which is to remain here?" and so on;—confidences in which Rachel felt she had no share, and feeling so, was wounded to the quick. On the second day that she was at Farnborough, Cecil Craven walked in to see her. She was alone in the sitting-room, or nearly so, Mrs. Arundel's youngest child, a boy of seven years old, being her only companion. She flushed with pleasure at his entrance, and rose hastily to greet him; and as he took her hands in his, he bent and kissed her. She had never felt so glad before to see him—to read the proofs of his affectionate interest in her in his eyes, or feel them in the pressure of his hands. Her whole heart went out in her answering look, as she exclaimed—

"Dearest Cecil, how glad I am to see you!"

"And I also," he replied: "I am very hard worked just now, and have only been once over to the Court; but I thought it would be strange if I didn't contrive to snatch a few hours from duty to see my——" And then he bent his mouth to her ear, and whispered the rest of the sentence, for Mrs. Arundel's little boy was gaping and gazing at their proceedings; and Rachel coloured and smiled, and cast down the long lashes to shade her beaming eyes, and looked very happy and very pretty.

"I was at Craven Court last week," commenced Cecil again; and then, observing the child's eyes still fixed upon them both, he deliberately rose, and taking the boy by the shoulder, put him outside the door, and closed it. "Come, my lad," he said, as he dismissed him, "you go to Caroline, there's a good child." And then reseating himself, went on, "I was at the Court last week, Rachel, and my mother spoke a great deal to me about you." The girl's crimsoned face was lifted to his inquiringly, and almost with alarm. "You don't distrust me,

do you?" he said, reproachfully. "No, Rachel; she started the subject herself, and was very anxious to learn all about you and your husband. It was she who asked me to meet you at Southampton yesterday; and she wants you and Norreys to go and stay at the Court as soon as you conveniently can."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, shrinking from him. "No, Cecil, I couldn't. Don't ask me."

"I don't ask you, dear," he said. "I would be the last to urge you to do anything repugnant to your feelings; but you have done so before, Rachel, and think of it, my dear,—that is all."

"I couldn't," was all she replied; "indeed, I couldn't!"

"It is a hard case to decide, in which there is no question of duty concerned," he said, presently, "especially when it is for another. But follow the dictates of your own will, Rachel. You are of too openly forgiving, too generous a nature, to let it lead you very wrong,—too full of pity for the misfortunes of others," he added, lower-

ing his voice, "to let your inclinations bias your charity."

She played with the hand which held her own, and was silent for a time; then she said, softly,—

"I *will* think of it, Cecil."

"What about *her?*" he demanded presently, intimating Mrs. Arundel, by pointing his thumb towards the sitting-room.

"How do you mean?" said Rachel, almost laughing.

"What is she going to do with herself?"

"That I cannot tell you," she replied, becoming earnest. "I am very anxious to know myself, and have tried to find out from dear Elise; but I do not think she has decided upon any plan at present."

"Well, I hope the report that I have heard concerning her is not true,—that's all."

"What is it?"

"That she intends settling down near Craven Court. My mother writes me word this morning that the lease of a little place, called 'Laburnum Cottage,' close to the Court gates, is being treated for, by a widow

lady of the name of Arundel, and wants to know if it is the same person. My mother appears quite anxious that it should be. She imagines our friend here to be a widow indeed,—up to her eyes in crape and bombasine, and a walking text-book. She'll find herself rather mistaken if they should happen to meet."

"Oh, Cecil!" exclaimed Rachel, "you haven't been setting Mrs. Craven against poor Elise, I hope, nor saying any of the wicked things about her that you used to give vent to occasionally at Gibraltar?"

But before he could reply to this question, the lady under discussion entered the room, looking very stout and hot, in her close black dress and jaunty widow's cap, and rather perturbed in her temper. Major Craven had not honoured her with a visit yet in her Farnborough lodgings, and she was annoyed at his coming to see Rachel as soon as she arrived; added to which, the little boy, having considered himself injured by his untimely expulsion from the sitting-room, had rushed open-mouthed to his mamma with the information that "Captain

Craven had come and kissed Mrs. Norreys, and put him out of the room because he looked at them;" so that she had considered, for the credit of the house, that it became her duty to put a stop to such proceedings. Even as she entered, Rachel's hand still hung in Cecil Craven's, and she hastily withdrew it with a blush, and rose to make room for her friend on the sofa.

"Pray, don't disturb yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Arundel, ensconcing herself in an arm-chair on the other side of the room, and commencing to fan violently. "I am sorry to interrupt your little *tête-à-tête*, but really I could not stay in the bed-room any longer."

"Why didn't you come in before, Elise?" said Rachel.

"Oh, my dear child, I knew better, of course, than not to let you have a few minutes alone with such a *particular* friend as Captain Craven—*Major* Craven, I beg his pardon." And the tone with which the widow bestowed her dead husband's title on the newly-made major was a sarcasm in itself.

"Norreys is coming for you to-morrow,

I believe," said Cecil to Rachel, wishing to change the subject.

"Yes," interposed Mrs. Arundel, without permitting Rachel time to answer the question. "Is she not a naughty girl, Craven, to run away from a charming young husband like that, before he has rejoined her a fortnight? I would have turned her out of my house yesterday, and packed her after him, if I had only known it in time." And Mrs. Arundel shook her fan at Rachel with an archness that was very unpleasant, because it only seemed half playful.

"Well, Mrs. Norreys only came out of consideration for you," said Major Craven, rather curtly.

"Oh, I know that, the dear creature," replied Mrs. Arundel, fearful she had gone a little too far. "I know her devotion to me, and glad indeed I was to have her,—wasn't I, dear Rachel? Such a comfort as she has been to me!"

Rachel did not exactly see in what way; but she smiled at her friend, and said, "I hope so, dear;" and then, turning to Cecil, continued,—

"I had a note from my husband this afternoon, and he told me, if I should not be ready to go to Brompton to-morrow, to send him a line; but I have not written, and therefore he is sure to be here."

"About what time?" asked Cecil.

"I do not know," she said; "I never asked him."

"I am sorry for that—I should like to have seen him again. However, it will not be long before I look you up at Brompton. And now I must be off to the camp again. Good-bye."

This farewell was directed towards both the ladies; but when he had left the room, and descended half the stairs, he called out, in rather an unceremonious manner, "I say, Mrs. Norreys."

Rachel was standing at the moment, and she left the room directly to see what he wanted with her. As she did so, Mrs. Arundel looked after her, and positively trembled with passion.

"He shan't do it in my house," she said to herself. "He may carry on as he likes with her elsewhere,—it was all very well at

Gibraltar; but things are altered for both of us. I have borne a great deal from you, Cecil Craven; but I will not be insulted under my very eyes, and keep silence."

But all he had said to Rachel was,—"Don't forget the Court,—think about it,—for *my* sake:" and she had answered, "I will,—trust me," and returned to the side of her "bosom friend" again.

That evening was not a very pleasant one to either of them. Mrs. Arundel was sulky, or something very like it, and Rachel pre-occupied and thoughtful. She was glad when it was time to go to bed; still more so when the sun rose again, and it was time to get up, and put the few articles she had used into her box, and await the coming of her husband. He arrived during the morning, earlier than she had expected him; but she was ready to go.

"Quite sure, Rachel?" he asked. "I can go on to the camp (Craven asked me to look him up), and give you another day with Mrs. Arundel if you particularly wish it."

And her foolish pride had risen uppermost, and she had almost let herself in for

another day of torture; but good sense came to her aid and prevented it. She did, indeed, check the glad look of surprise which mounted into Raymond's face when she first denied any wish to stay longer at Farnborough, by laying the absence of her desire to the want of accommodation in the lodgings.

"I am putting Elise out, I can see," she said; "so I had better go to Brompton."

"Yes, I think you had, in that case," he answered; "but I am sorry for your disappointment, Rachel." Why did she not do, then, what her natural honesty dictated? Why did she not tell him at once that she was not so comfortable there, or so happy, as she expected to be at her own home? Because her pride set itself against her honesty, and knocked it down. This conversation took place at the lodging-house door, where Raymond having refused to go upstairs, Rachel had run down to speak to him. He was still diffident of intruding upon the sacredness of the widow's privacy, and had had no intention of being beguiled into the house; but when, on his

refusing his wife's request to that effect, Mrs. Arundel, in all the pomposity of her weeds, appeared herself in the passage to urge, with many beaming smiles to back her entreaties, that he would walk upstairs, she positively astonished Raymond into compliance. So he did as she desired, and spent a most uncomfortable half-hour with her in the hot little sitting-room, which had no blinds to its windows, and was furnished throughout with scarlet worsted damask, whilst his wife was putting on her walking apparel, and having her box corded by the dirty lodging-house servant. However, it was over at last. Rachel was ready to start. Raymond had altered several of his opinions concerning the state of mind of newly-made widows, and there was nothing to detain them longer.

"God bless you, my darling Rachel!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, exhibiting a great degree of fervour now the hour of parting had arrived. "Good-bye, my sweet, sweet girl! I don't know what I should have done without you, dearest. Oh, the comfort your dear wife has been to me, Mr.

Norreys. I sorely grudge giving her up to you again." And poor Raymond, easily gulled by the lady's apparent enthusiasm, bowed and smiled, and in himself was not at all surprised that any one should be sorry to part with such a friend as Rachel, and only gave one secret sigh to the thought that another held so firm a hold upon the heart he would have given worlds to know his own.

As soon as the husband and wife were fairly gone, Mrs. Arundel, tired of acting, turned to Caroline Wilson, the only person with whom she could afford to be natural.

"Well, Caroline," she exclaimed, with a gasp of relief, as she entered the bedroom, where that worthy was busily occupied in packing boxes and sorting wearing-apparel; "they are gone at last."

"Well, ma'am, and I should really think that it was about time, too. However Mrs. Norreys, calling herself a lady, can inconvenience another lady, like yourself, by coming upon her whilst in lodgings, and at such a time of distress and trouble, too, *I* can't think."

"Well, it certainly *was* inconvenient in the extreme," replied her mistress; "but it's over now; and I should think the reason of the visit was pretty plain. I shall not forget yesterday in a hurry. But I shall get into a scrape if I let such things go on here, Caroline. It really *is not* right, you know."

"Right, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, whose own youth not having passed entirely *sans reproche* was always virtuously indignant at the bare mention of other people's failings. "I should think not, indeed; for my part I don't understand such goings on, nor don't pretend to. I'm sure what I saw whilst living at the doctor's was enough to make your hair stand on end; and I never should have held my tongue as I have done, if it had not been that Wilson threatened me with ever so if I mentioned it to any one but himself. But I know what I know; and Mrs. Norreys, she has put my temper up so often, speaking to me as if I was a dog rather than a Christian, that I should not mind telling of her any day, if the matter could be

made worth my while, and kept a secret from Wilson; for Wilson is a terrible man, ma'am, when his temper is put up."

"A servant must inevitably see and hear a great deal that goes on in a house, Caroline; but when such things are likely to produce mischief in families, they are much better kept to one's self. Wilson is a worthy creature, and his wish for your silence is a right one."

Mrs. Arundel had put on an air of the most rigid discretion as she spoke, and pursed up her lips with becoming propriety; nevertheless she had perfectly made up her mind that Wilson's wish should be disregarded as soon as it should suit her convenience to make his wife speak, and that, perhaps, at no distant day. The waiting-woman read her determination as plainly as if it had been her own secret; but, prudent as she was artful, she made no remark upon the circumstance.

"Of course, ma'am, and such as you must know best. These boxes are ready now, ma'am, and I believe they are all that you intend to store."

"Yes, Caroline; and as you go home this evening, tell the man to send for them to-morrow morning, for I shall be glad to get them out of the house. I will leave word with the woman here to give them to him, because I am going over to Weybridge again myself, and may not be back till late."

"Will the cottage suit, do you think, ma'am?" inquired Caroline Wilson, with the old respectful manner.

"Yes, I imagine so; but the situation is what I am so charmed with—close to the Court, such an advantage! The landlord and I are disputing just now about terms, but I expect that I shall get my own way with him, as I am willing to take the house on a lease."

"Then you are sure the neighbourhood will suit you, ma'am?"

"Quite sure," replied Mrs. Arundel, and she smiled as she said so. She knew *why* it could not fail to suit her. Why she had chosen it before all other neighbourhoods. Because she had a great plan in her head, and till that succeeded, she must live near

Weybridge, and when it succeeded, what would signify the lease of a trumpery cottage. But in the meanwhile she kept her plans in the dark, and her own eyes open.

"That will do, Caroline, for this evening," said her mistress, later in the day; "and if Wilson should wish you to stay at home to-morrow, perhaps you will send up your daughter (that pretty girl is your daughter, is she not?) to have an eye to the children whilst I am away."

"Yes, ma'am, I will. Martha is my daughter, ma'am, and a fine girl, though I say it. I scarcely expected to find her so improved on my return. She was apprenticed to the dressmaking business in London whilst we were at Gibraltar, ma'am. She will be only eighteen next December, but she's very clever with her needle."

"An uncommonly fine-looking young woman," repeated Mrs. Arundel; "and you must be very proud of her, Caroline. Well, then, I shall expect either her or yourself to be here to-morrow."

"Certainly, ma'am; good night." And Mrs. Wilson left the room, her eyes spark-

ling, and her cheek flushed with the pleasure she had experienced in hearing Mrs. Arundel sound the praises of her Martha. It was the only subject on which you could touch this woman's hard, revengeful, avaricious nature; her love for, and pride in, her daughter was her one vulnerable point.

Her mistress had also her vulnerable point; and though it was not so quickly discernible, it might easily have been guessed at, if the thought with which she settled herself to sleep that night could have been translated into words. For—

"Under his very eyes," her heart said; "almost beneath the same roof-tree; in the path he daily traverses; if I cannot, by all my blandishments and tears throw again over him some of the enchantment of the past, I will at least strive to mar his future. If I cannot have Cecil Craven, I, who have the best right—the right of precedence—no other woman shall!"

END OF VOL. I.

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